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G W E N

O R T H E C O U S I N S



I N T W O V O L U M E S

V O L I I

Gwen

Or

The Cousins

By A. M. Goodrich
Author of '*Claudia*'



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PART II.

(CONTINUED.)

Fra gl' inamanti cuori il cuor mio geme,
E impicciolisce, e sua virtù s' atterra ;
Fra i malignanti cuori il cuor mio freme,
E orgoglio oppone a orgoglio, e guerra a guerra :
Fra gli odii altrui l' anima mia è infeconda.
D'alti esempj d'amor, deh ! la circonda !

SILVIO PELLICO.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

Oh, get thee gone !
And leave those woes alone which I alone
Am bound to underbear.

SHAKESPEARE.

‘WHERE is Geraldine?’ asked Mrs. Faulkner, anxiously, when her husband rejoined her after a longer interval than she had expected.

‘Gone to her own room. She behaved with that disrespect and disobedience which I fear you have often allowed, but which I will never tolerate. I desired her not to return here to-night.’

‘I must go to see the poor child,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, in alarm, preparing to rise.

‘Leave her alone,’ replied Mr. Faulkner, imperatively.

‘Let me at least take her some tea; it is impossible to leave her all alone till morning.’

‘Why impossible? However, you may send Catherine to her room.’ He rang the bell.

‘Tell Catherine to ask Miss Eustace whether she will have any tea brought to her?’

Catherine tried Geraldine’s door; it was fastened
‘Miss Geraldine, shall I bring you any tea?’

‘No.’

‘May I fetch you a light?’

‘No.’

‘Let me come in, miss, and see you before you go to bed.’

‘No. Papa told me to stay in my room, and I don’t intend to let any one into it. I want nothing.’

Catherine did not repeat this dialogue to Mrs. Faulkner, who looked ill and frightened enough to excite her compassion as it was, and a glance at Mr. Faulkner’s countenance told her that intercession would at least as yet be vain; so she contented herself with saying that Miss Eustace required nothing.

As she closed the door, Mr. Faulkner seated himself at the writing-table, and began a letter, occasionally pausing as if for consideration; the first he tore up, and began a second; this he finished, read over, and folded. It seemed limited to a few lines. Meanwhile Mrs. Faulkner watched him nervously, supposing, though she knew not why, that these proceedings bore on the fate of her poor Geraldine. Mr. Faulkner looked up, and met her eye.

‘I am writing to my sister at Brighton,’ he said, drily, ‘and bidding her to expect you and Geraldine there to-morrow evening. Your removal from Lascelles will cut short any impudent design of Madame Baldovini’s to set foot here again. I have had quite enough of that woman, Diane; she was not far from making a fool of me before all this happened, perhaps; but now I think I see her in her true colours. Let us hear no more of her.’

Mr. Faulkner generously abstained from announcing his belief that ‘Marianna’ had quite made a fool of his wife, or rather found one ready made to her hand. He was sorry for Diane, and fond of her even now when he saw such just cause for anger; and he was striving to save her and her child from the consequences of her imprudence; for he believed her repentance to be sincere and bitter. Nor dared Mrs. Faulkner object to any method of cure he might propose, though she winced at the thought of Lady Rivers. She ardently desired to know how much of her folly and misery was laid bare to her sister-in-law’s scrutiny, but she knew not how to ask, and only hazarded the remark:

‘Lady Rivers will think this very sudden.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr. Faulkner, and he threw the letter across the table to her to read.

‘Dear Sister,—I am going to send Diane and Geraldine down to you for a month. I don’t like their looks; I know that you will take care of them, and make them comfortable. Short notice,—but you must do whatever will be least trouble to you in putting them up. Make what arrangements you can to receive them to-morrow night; I shall not be with you myself before Saturday.’

Mrs. Faulkner refolded the letter and gave it back.

‘Thank you; I dare say you are right,’ she forced herself to observe.

‘The least that Lady Rivers can think is that this is an expedient for getting rid of the Baldovini, in obedience to her suggestion. Well, that will make her reception of us very gracious!’ said Mrs. Faulkner to herself, with a sigh. ‘I am glad,’ she added, aloud, ‘that you agree with me in thinking it quite unnecessary to mention to Jenima or any one the cause of this movement.’

‘And how long do you think that Geraldine will keep her secret, supposing that you keep it for her?’

‘Poor child! the first secret she has ever had. She is not skilled in concealment.’

‘That I believe,’ replied Mr. Faulkner.

Catherine’s rest was broken that night by more than one silent watch at Geraldine’s door, and when, with the dawn of day, her bell rang, she answered it without delay.

‘Catherine, you must go to mamma and tell her I am very ill; I have never closed my eyes, and now, my head—only put your hand on it.’

‘My dear child, it is very hot. Do lie down; try to sleep a little, or at least to be quiet. I should be sorry to disturb your mamma yet.’

‘Disturb her! you think, then, that she is sleeping. Yes, she and papa can rest while they are destroying

me. However, I must see her before papa goes to London. I suppose he will go ; I suppose every one will go on just the same. But oh ! what a difference to me ! Mind, I will not see papa again ; he frightens me. All my life long I have been afraid of him—the only person I ever have feared ; and last night—’ She paused and contemplated in silent terror the recollection of her interview ; then exclaimed, ‘ Oh ! Catherine ! I could not bear this over again. Fetch mamma.’

This time there was such plaintive, child-like sorrow in her tone, that Catherine could not refuse compliance.

In a few moments Mrs. Faulkner was sitting on Geraldine’s bed, holding her in her arms.

‘ Mother, tell papa how ill I am, how soon he will kill me.’

‘ Don’t, my child, don’t.’

‘ You must entreat him for me. I don’t know how. I should make him angry again. I am so very angry myself.’

‘ My dear child, you must try to obey. I always told you so. Ippolito is a mere boy, you are a mere girl ; you will forget all this very soon. It was silly and wrong to let you be so much together. I confess it all.’

‘ It was very silly and very wrong,’ replied Geraldine, bitterly, ‘ so to do, and now to tell us to forget each other. We will not. Children you may call us ; but there is a strength in our natures beyond what maturer years would give to tamer ones. You must not come here to talk thus ; go and intercede for me, if you will.’

Mrs. Faulkner retired. ‘ Catherine, how am I to bid her prepare to start for Brighton ?’

Catherine undertook the task. One of the arguments which she employed was :

‘ Would you exasperate Mr. Faulkner further by violence and rebellion ?’ Afterwards she said to her,

‘Why attach such importance to remaining at Lascelles? It looks like a perverse temper to offer causeless opposition.’

‘Why would I remain here?’ cried Geraldine. ‘Because I cannot yet believe that Ippolito is gone hence. Here he sung to me—here he brought me flowers—here—’ and she threw herself on Catherine’s neck and sobbed, ‘he told me that he loved me, and had loved me from the day he saw me. I will not quit this place; it is needless cruelty, wanton tyranny that imposes the necessity. Go to my mother; tell her that she is answerable for the life and the happiness of her own child. How dares she thus abandon my destiny to another!’

‘My poor child, I cannot use this wild language to her. She accedes to Mr. Faulkner’s decisions, not because they are arbitrary, but because she knows him to have your real happiness at heart, and to be as mindful of it as if he were your father. Surely you owe submission to those who have shown you the utmost tenderness since your life began. Is all their love, all their kindness, to be forgotten in one wild, wilful hour?’

‘I know not what may have been the motive of their past kindness. Not love for me—self-gratification rather in some shape or other. They humoured me, they petted me as a toy, to crush me pitilessly the moment that my pleasure was not their pleasure. Am I to endure this?’

‘Yes,’ said Catherine, folding her tenderly in her arms; ‘you must endure this present thwarting of your will, strange and stern as it now seems to you. Resistance will but make you suffer more. Meanwhile, in leaving Lascelles I assure you I do not think that you will resign any chance of seeing the Count again. He has too much pride—I hope, too much honour—to return under Mr. Faulkner’s roof since he has rejected him thus.’

At length Geraldine consented to offer no further

resistance to Mr. Faulkner's final orders, and permitted Catherine, for she would suffer no one else to approach her, to make preparations for her departure. As she put her foot on the step of the carriage, she shuddered violently and started back. She turned to Catherine, not to her mother, and putting her hand to her heart, with a look of piercing anguish, said :

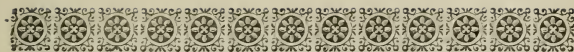
‘You know not what presentiment I have here. I foretell that there is not one of you concerned in taking me hence who will not learn to regret it with a grief keener perhaps than mine is now, for there will be remorse in it.’ She stepped into the carriage as she ended.

Her mother, in an agony of terror, threw herself on her knees, and seized her daughter's hand :

‘We will not go, Geraldine ; I cannot.’

‘We will go,’ replied Geraldine, sternly ; ‘I feel now that it would kill me to remain.’ And hiding her face, she said, ‘Tell me when we are far from Lascelles.’





CHAPTER XXXV.

Peace, lady, pause, or be more temperate.—
Then speak again, not all thy former tale,
But this one word : whether thy tale be true.
Oh ! if thou teach me to believe this sorrow,
Teach thou this sorrow how to make me die.

SHAKESPEARE.

GERALDINE, from the time of her removal to Brighton, persisted in an unbroken course. She was a perfect automaton, and the sole reply she would yield to any attempt to obtain the expression of a preference from her, was :

‘ You refuse me the only thing that I desire. I am utterly indifferent what else you give or deny.’

There was one person on whom she still seemed to rely—that was Catherine. There was one to whom she could not be unkind ; that was Agnes.

On Saturday morning a letter arrived from Mr. Faulkner : ‘ I can’t come down myself till next Saturday, by which time I hope I shall find you comfortable. Madame Baldovini and her son sail for Calais to night. I have seen both again ; they now fully understand me to be in earnest, and hope nothing from me. My own view of the subject is, that from the moment I convinced your friend that to marry her son would cost Geraldine her dower, she had no sort of wish that such a sacrifice should be made for him. If he shared in this common-sense decision of his mother’s, why I must confess his acting even surpasses hers ; but he is young, and I believe felt, or imagined he felt, the passionate grief

which he displayed. By this time its very violence must have exhausted it. They are gone, and I trust never to hear more of them. I think Geraldine had better know this at once. I saw Rivers to-day; he is coming down to his mother. You will see him before you see me.'

There was also a letter from Mrs. Owen, (now in London with her daughter,) written in terms warmly expressive of gratitude and of satisfaction.

'Catherine,' said Mrs. Faulkner, 'you must tell this to Geraldine; she will not let me address her. Perhaps it may be better when this is over. Oh! Catherine! Lady Rivers's son is coming, and I shall have to see her so happy in him—and well she may be; even little Gwen is rejoicing her mother's heart. None are wretched but I.'

Now Catherine was disposed to think Geraldine far more wretched and far more to be pitied than any one else concerned. Her natural feelings were very acute, and she experienced all the poignancy of a first sorrow. Untaught to reason against the gratification of any wish, unacquainted with the very name of self-denial, she was for the first time sternly refused what she desired with an earnestness unknown before. Her violence of temper, her total want of any habit of regulating her conduct by those principles of religion which it was taken for granted that she had imbibed—these were faults surely to be laid to the charge of her past education, and for which her mother was more blameable than herself. Catherine, in spite of the affection which she entertained for Mrs. Faulkner, felt now a degree of indignation which induced her to scan her failings with a severer eye than she had ever yet directed on them. Especially when weak self-exculpations alternated with weak self-reproaches, she became the more disposed to endeavour to console, support, and direct the daughter than the mother. There was a better chance of moderating the vehemence of Geraldine than of fortifying the infirmity of Mrs.

Faulkner ; and Catherine, like most people who are strong in energy and good sense, was averse to labours which had no reasonable prospect of success. Besides, Mr. Faulkner had taken the reins in his own hand, and his wife at present blindly obeyed him. Catherine had misgivings as to his judgment and his temper, but it was not for her to interfere with him. She turned to Geraldine with a quiet devotion that was not rejected, and undertook to acquaint her with the departure of the Baldovini.

The girl listened in amazement ; she raised her hand to her head as if in pain, fixed her eyes on Catherine's face with a look of inquiry, moved her lips, but could not utter, and burst into a flood of tears.

Catherine's attempts to soothe told less than her own determined efforts to regain composure. It was her grief that she wrestled with, for it humbled her to feel it ; her anger she neither curbed nor concealed.

'I know, Catherine, that you would not deceive me to please them. If any one else had told me this, I would have thrown back the assertion as a paltry falsehood, and have laughed to scorn all attempts to persuade me that he could forsake me. I have read in novels of letters kept back, and falsehoods, and tricks of all sorts ; but you—ah ! I know you better. Still, Catherine, this is scarcely possible !'

She paused, and look and tone pleaded so longingly for contradiction that Catherine could not refrain from a momentary wish that she could have recalled, instead of reiterating her words.

'Nothing can be more certain than their departure, my dear child.'

'Then would that he had never come !' cried Geraldine, passionately. 'Not one week past, his vehement protestations !—at those I could laugh ; but that he would not let me quit him, even to go to my own mother, without exacting every promise his lips could

frame or mine assent to—' She covered her eyes with her hands, awhile silent and immovable.

'Good heavens! And did not such conduct alarm you?—make you doubt that he merited the love which he sought so unworthily?'

'No; I promised without doubt or scruple, for I thought none but myself had any control over my destiny.'

'Be it so,' said Catherine, earnestly. 'Employ the authority you would assert to some good purpose; recal your heart into your own keeping; repress feelings which can only be productive of misery; recognise for yourself how undeserving he is of your love.'

And Geraldine really appeared capable of acting as Catherine urged her to act.

'He has forsaken me.' Pride and anger repeated those words in accents so harsh that the deeper tones of grief were for a time inaudible. The gentle exclamation of Imogen, 'My dear lord, thou'rt one of the false ones,' found no echo in her bosom. Yet Geraldine was on her guard not to resent Ippolito's defection in any manner encouraging to those whom she considered to have treated her with cruelty. Neither Mr. Faulkner nor her mother must be permitted to rejoice in that which pierced her to the heart, nor were they to welcome her back as one restored to her right mind after a brief madness. She would not be drawn one inch nearer to them by Ippolito's defection; she would stand, or, she added, with a sinking heart, fall alone. With a fortitude well fitted to be the instrument of a well-regulated mind and heart, but which in her hold was almost self-destructive, she forced her anguish to be secret and silent, and resumed some appearance of her former spirit; but to whom was she to turn? Not to Lady Rivers, even though that lady had pursued the wise system of never hazarding an allusion in Geraldine's presence to the cause of her removal to Brighton. Poor Agnes! even now Geraldine experienced a somewhat pleasur-

able sensation in giving her pleasure ; but Agnes, dull as she was, felt that there was a difference, and said :

‘What is the matter with you, Geraldine ? Are you ill ?’

Geraldine turned sharply to her :

‘Now, Agnes, listen to me, and try to understand me. Don’t say to me nor to any one else—not to my mother, nor yours, nor Jemima, ‘Geraldine is ill, or sad.’ I am just the same to you as always, if you are good to me, and do not vex me.’

The tears came into Agnes’ eyes at the asperity of this reply.

‘I am very sorry. I did not mean to vex you.’

‘No, dear, you did not,’ said Geraldine, kissing her tenderly. ‘The one, the only one, perhaps, who would not hurt or grieve me in the smallest thing,’ she added to herself.

‘I am so glad,’ said Agnes, restored to happiness, ‘that Francis is come, and is going to stay with us a whole month. Sha’n’t you like to see him ? Are not you glad, too ?’

‘Yes, Agnes, for your sake,’ replied Geraldine, ‘and not sorry for my own,’ she added to herself. ‘I can talk to him better than to any one else.’





CHAPTER XXXVI.

So every place seemed painful, and each changing vain.

SPENSER.

NOW Lady Rivers did not rejoice with singleness of heart in the arrival of her son at Brighton. She had an especial horror of his falling in love with Geraldine, and it was chiefly on account of his return to England and vicinity to London during the present spring, that she had suggested to her brother all possible objections to Geraldine's presentation at court. Mrs. Faulkner's supposition that she had also urged the removal of the Baldovini was unfounded. The two sisters-in-law often misconstrued each other. The fact was, that while Lady Rivers, with her usual asperity, reprehended Mrs. Faulkner for the admission of her foreign friends to her house, she nevertheless could not quite shut out an idea which sometimes suggested itself that the consequences might be the removal of certain disquieting thoughts which she often experienced. It was evident that Mr. Faulkner, childless himself, loved this young girl with all her faults, was proud of her beauty, and by no means insensible to the *eclat* which might attend it; Lady Rivers, foreseeing the probability of her carrying off the bulk of Mr. Faulkner's wealth, provided that she formed an alliance pleasing to him, thought this very hard on herself and on her children; the simplest remedy to the danger that presented itself was to send for her son and unite him to Miss Eustace. But Lady

Rivers had an insuperable objection to Geraldine for a daughter-in-law. Her haughty insolence and undisguised aversion to her control from earliest childhood were too alarming, too unpromising, for Lady Rivers to attempt conciliation. She resigned herself to incur any loss rather than to make such an acquisition, and she was by no means pleased with the turn in circumstances which brought Sir Francis immediately into that sphere from which she had striven to exclude him. The young baronet was a soldier, with the frankness and manliness of his profession ; good looking, good tempered, of a kind heart and a generous spirit, energetic in his professional duties, acquiescing cheerfully in the slenderness of his means, grateful to his uncle for many acts of liberality, and by no means forming any grasping expectations for the future.

‘My dear mother, depend upon it, this poor girl is woefully mismanaged,’ said Sir Francis Rivers, a few mornings after his arrival at Brighton. ‘I am very glad that I came here ; I had a fancy to see her again, no longer the pretty, passionate child whom I so well remember teasing and making to stamp with anger, nor yet one of your fashionable women, as she would have been had I waited till next year ; but a very beautiful creature, all nature and impulse, and to be led by a silken thread by any one who knows how to meet a high spirit. It is not her mother’s milk-and-water ways, nor my worthy uncle’s crabbedness, nor, pardon me, a little over primness in you and dear, good, well-behaved Jemima, that will cure her of any wayward fancy. I wish it might just be left to me to conduct this affair for a little space, and I would answer for sending her up to town as reasonable and as merry-hearted a girl as you would wish to see, before the season has fairly begun. The first thing is for my uncle to revoke his most absurd decision as to her not being presented this year. I should like to see her with all the plumes and paraphernalia you ladies wear for court ; she would look like a queen

herself, and that is what she wants to be. Let her have a throng of subjects round her throne, and she will not think so much of the homage of this solitary Italian Count, who, I dare say, has flattered her ear with rhapsodies of nonsense that we Englishmen know nothing of.'

'In the first place,' interrupted Lady Rivers, with impatience, 'he is the handsomest man I ever saw.'

'There are good looking fellows among us, too,' replied Sir Francis, complacently. 'As to Geraldine herself, you told me not a word, not a smile, was to be extorted. Why, mother, I have enjoyed a fair share of both. To be sure she does look very sentimental sometimes, which is not at all unbecoming, and softens a face which will bear softening; there is an occasional thunder-cloud, and a flash of lightning when her mother approaches, especially if she try to whisper anything tender, or to pull her shawl a little closer, or to enjoin any precaution, as if she would say, 'How dare you bid me take care of myself when you have taken such bad care of me?' I think her natural good sense has led her to make some observation of that sort.'

'Possibly,' observed Lady Rivers, drily; 'Diane is a sad fool, undoubtedly. And you can tolerate such conduct as you describe, from a daughter to a mother?'

'Why, no, not exactly; but in this case I decidedly blame the mother the most of the two. Yet you know, as a boy, I had a desperate fancy for Mrs. Faulkner.'

'Now it is transferred to Geraldine.'

'Perhaps so. She is certainly the most interesting at present. I did expect to see Mrs. Faulkner grieved or frightened out of her affectation—but no—she is the same Diane through it all. Now there is wonderful reality in Geraldine—plenty of character—it only wants moulding.'

'Plenty of temper,' said his mother; 'it only wants subduing.'

'Be it so,' replied her son, in a tone of acquiescence

more provoking than contradiction, for it was not in the least a tone of discouragement. Sir Francis was in fact fully convinced that in a short time he could make Geraldine everything she ought to be; others might fail in the attempt, this he thought very probable, but he would not. They seemed to be going the wrong way to work; he would go the right. Such was his misinterpretation of the fact that Geraldine found in him a refuge from others, with whom all intercourse at present was difficult or impossible. She listened to him with a gratifying appearance of attention, while her thoughts were far otherwise engaged. When she saw that he was satisfied, she wondered how she had escaped the betrayal of her abstraction, and gloried in the triumphs she won over her pain. It pleased her to think that she had smiled where others would have wept. Still the veil she wore was not so impenetrable as she imagined, and it was exactly the transparency here and there, allowing the eye of Sir Francis to discover some of the secrets of her spirit which excited his compassion, and heightened and maintained his interest in her. On one occasion he could not help evincing these feelings. Geraldine was sitting on the beach as far distant from the rest of her party as she could well place herself, and did not show displeasure when Sir Francis approached. She listened, and she answered as usual, but in the midst of their discourse, in spite of herself, a silent, solitary tear stole down her cheek. She talked on as if she knew it not, or at least expected him not to perceive it, but Sir Francis changed his tone.

‘Forgive me, my dear Miss Eustace—Geraldine, I have always called you Geraldine—forgive me if I pain, and do not let me offend you. It would be a pity to take offence at the expression of a sincere interest in your well-being. Idolized, cherished as you are, there yet appears to me in some respects a loneliness in your situation. There are times when a friend is perhaps better than any relation. Poor Agnes, she

cannot be your friend, Geraldine, though I assure you it has touched me to the heart to see how much you have been hers; but don't you think that I might fulfil that office? You may smile, I am delighted to see you smile, but you are not merely to laugh away the proposition. You know I have years and experience on my side. I am greatly your senior; ten years I should think. Now don't you believe, Geraldine, that if you possessed a brother thus much older than yourself, who had at least seen more of the world, and felt all the concern for your happiness that a brother would feel, who, if no prodigy of wit or wisdom, had the opinion of a man of honour to give you whenever you needed it, don't you believe that he would have been of value to you?

'I do, indeed,' replied Geraldine, in a choked voice.

'And if such a person existed, how should you treat him?'

'I can't tell.'

'With confidence and openness as to your feelings—with some toleration of his opinions when they ran counter to your own?'

'The first, I think, I should bestow where I believed them sought from real affection; as to the last, I cannot say. I am not very tolerant of contradiction. Perhaps you may suspect that; or if you have not found it out for yourself, you have probably heard it often enough from others.'

'Oh! I trust most to my own observations,' replied Sir Francis; 'and I allow I have made the discovery that you speak of. Yet it has not disheartened me, Geraldine, not frightened me out of saying what I have said this evening, and have looked for the occasion to say.'

Geraldine, as she returned to the house leaning on Sir Francis's arm, repeated to herself: 'The friendship of an honourable English gentleman,—an acquisition better worth making, perhaps, than that of the glittering tinsel I have hoarded as gold.' As she went into

her room she met Sarah Collinson hovering about the door. On their hasty departure from Lascelles this girl had been brought with them, through the representation of her aunt that at so sudden a notice she could not send her elsewhere, and did not like to leave her not under her own eye. Mrs. Faulkner assented without difficulty to the consequence of these reasonings. Geraldine had never made a favourite of Sarah, and did not now understand finding her so near her apartment. She threw the door to as she entered, sharply; the girl started at the noise, and as she began to descend the staircase, cast one glance at the closed door, and said:

‘I think that I shall have my young mistress more civil to me before long.’

The first thing that Geraldine saw on her table was a sealed letter. The paper, the folding, the superscription, the seal, all were foreign in appearance. Her heart beat violently. She held the missive one moment tightly in her hand, then broke the seal and opened it. Glancing over the first line, she started up, and locked the door.

It was Ippolito, who wrote in his native tongue; the language such as she had last heard from his lips. One sentence ran thus:

‘It is utterly impossible you can for one moment have believed that we were really parted, as they may have flattered themselves that we were; so impossible that I have not been disquieted by a fear lest your confidence in me could be shaken.’

‘But it was,’ exclaimed Geraldine, stopping; ‘it was. How could I doubt? How could I injure him by doubting, and revealing my doubts?’

She felt as if she had a great wrong to repair. Ippolito told her how to repair it.

‘I am here,’ he wrote, ‘in Brighton. Before another sunset I shall have seen you again—we shall have told each other something of what we have suffered. I took my mother to Paris; I have left her there, and

returned to you. This reaches you by means of Sarah Collinson, of whom, as my mother's attendant, I know something, and through whom alone I can find any means of reaching you. Trust her, as I do, and come with her to-morrow to the beach, where I shall be waiting—'

There were passionate entreaties to comply. He described how all his supplications to see her again had been rejected by Mr. Faulkner. 'What unjustifiable conduct! Who is he, that he is to tyrannise over you thus? I asked him not for his gold, and you are not his. Under his roof never will I set my foot again; anywhere else, what right has he to forbid our meeting?'

This reasoning prevailed with Geraldine. She never asked herself whether Catherine would not regard the employment of it just as she had his previous extortion of promises unauthorized by her mother; she never inquired what verdict her new friend, a man of honour, would pass on it. She had wronged Ippolito, and had been miserable while so doing; now she was happy in restored confidence and re-awakened love, and her happiness her tormentors should not wrest from her. There was a tremulous knock at her door. She hid her letter, and prepared to answer it; she must not awaken suspicion.

Alas! Geraldine, that precaution was the first step in deceit.

She unlocked the door, threw it open, and stood there as proudly as if she could defy scrutiny. It was her mother, who had made that timid appeal. Geraldine remained inflexible as a statue.

'Will you not come down stairs? We are waiting tea for you, my child.'

'Why did you wait?'

'I brought in the Rivers with me.'

'Oh! why?' said Geraldine, with displeasure.

'I thought you might like it. Agnes wanted to come. Sir Francis is very agreeable,' faltered Mrs.

Faulkner, in a tone of apology ; but Geraldine had passed her and descended the stairs.

Geraldine seated herself at the tea-table with a burning spot of colour on her cheek, and constraint in her manner. Sir Francis observed her, saying to himself :

‘She is thinking over what I said to her. She was evidently glad to find that she had a friend near, one by whom she can make herself understood. Poor girl ; surrounded by those whom she frightens, or who frighten her, she wants a little rational advice. I shall easily put all this nonsense out of her head. I declare I am not sure that I shall not end by falling in love with her myself. Sheer mismanagement, and nothing else, is the ground of the terrible stories my mother has got up about her temper.’

But Geraldine had quite forgotten Sir Francis’s recent conversation in the overwhelming change which had taken place in her affairs since it was held, and had lost all thought of turning to him for counsel in the contemplation of the humiliating necessity of making a confidante of Sarah Collinson.

At length the evening was over. Geraldine was in her room again. She rang the bell ; Sarah answered it, and closed the door behind her with an air of mystery. The blood mounted high in Geraldine’s face ; her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth ; she made an effort, and said :

‘Be ready, if you please, to walk with me at seven o’clock in the morning.’

There was an unconquerable haughtiness in her tone, yet it was herself, not her menial, who was the object of her contempt.

‘Very well, miss,’ Sarah answered, with pert familiarity, such as one hour since she dared not have employed.

‘I want nothing more,’ said Geraldine.

No sooner had the girl withdrawn, than Geraldine, hiding her crimson face in her hands, and shaking over

them her golden tresses like a thick veil, murmured 'Oh ! shame, shame !'

'But they have driven me to it!' she exclaimed after a pause, tossing back her head wildly. She threw herself on her couch in an agony of tears, and thus Catherine found her. But Geraldine was in no humour to be soothed by Catherine this evening; she repulsed, and drove her away. Catherine read in this conduct merely the passing caprice of a spoiled child, sometimes inviting, sometimes repelling, the very same thing. But Geraldine knew and concealed the deeper cause which existed for the excessive irritability which she felt. She was loath to dye herself unnecessarily with the guilt of the hypocrisy of listening to words sure to be at variance with all she had in contemplation. In the midst of her shame and terror, there was also a species of wild exultation in the thought that yet a few hours, and she should again behold Ippolito, whom she had believed, nay, had told herself, she desired never to look on more.





CHAPTER XXXVII.

Tal smania ho nel seno
Tal benda ho sul ciglio
Che l'alma di freno
Capace non è.

METASTASIO.

‘MISS GERALDINE took Sarah Collinson to walk with her this morning, ma’am,’ said Catherine to Mrs. Faulkner. ‘They are not come in yet.’

‘What new fancy is this?’ replied Mrs. Faulkner. ‘If she wanted to walk at this hour, I don’t know that it will do her any harm, but I would rather you accompanied her than Sarah, a great deal.’

‘Certainly, ma’am,’ answered Catherine; ‘I do not think that Sarah is at all the person to be out with her. I hear their steps on the stairs now.’

‘Open the door, then; I dare say she will look in.’

‘I will call her, ma’am,’ said Catherine.

‘Well, my child, how early you are! Where have you been?’

‘Down to the sea.’

‘I hope the air has done you good. You have more colour. But Catherine shall go with you the next time.’

‘Oh! I sha’n’t repeat the experiment,’ said Geraldine, coldly, and left the room.

Catherine could not understand Geraldine throughout that day. She was almost as repulsive to her as she had hitherto been to her mother. She shut herself up in her own room, and when she came out of it showed no disposition to speak to any one but Agnes,

whom she took up stairs with her to look at her trinket-box. Agnes had often seen it before, but saw it again with fresh exclamations of delight.

‘In what order you are putting everything, Geraldine,’ she cried.

‘Yes. I am very restless to-day. I must do something. Here, Agnes, do you see this ring? Do you think it pretty?’

‘Beautiful, most beautiful,’ replied Agnes, with childish admiration.

‘Well, it is the only trinket in all that heap that I gave myself. I bought it with my own money one day, and now I give it to you, if you like it.’

‘Like it! Geraldine, how good you are to me! But you are—there is no one like you—so very, very good!’ and she shook her head thoughtfully.

‘Agnes,’ cried Geraldine, with sudden passion, ‘if you repeat that you must go away. I will not have you say that any more—now mind.’

‘Must I not?’ said Agnes. ‘How can I help it?’

‘You must try. You have been taught before now never to tell a lie; now, to say that I am good, is not true, so do not say it.’

Poor Agnes shook her head, hopelessly puzzled.

‘Here; hold out your finger, that I may put your ring on it.’

Agnes obeyed in silence; then looked up in Geraldine’s face: ‘You are not angry now?’

‘Nor ever was. Agnes, I never was angry with you in my life.’

‘Were you not?’ cried Agnes, joyfully. ‘But that is good!’

Geraldine moved away, and seemed engaged in another part of the room, while Agnes played with her ring. Suddenly Geraldine came back to her, threw herself on her neck, kissing her, and weeping passionately. Agnes was submissive, but seemed scarcely to heed her, so intently did she examine her toy. Presently there was a knock at the door.

‘Miss Agnes must come home now.’

Geraldine would scarcely part with her.

‘Lady Rivers said that Miss Agnes must not be later than four o’clock.’

‘Go, then,’ cried Geraldine, impatiently; ‘and all my comfort this day goes with you.’

Sarah Collinson asked to drink tea that evening with an old friend whom she had unexpectedly met. Her aunt objected to her gadding in a strange place like Brighton. ‘Going to see a friend is not gadding,’ whimpered Sarah. ‘She knew many little things that had happened at Lascelles, which had come to her observation, things which she did not suppose her aunt thought that she knew.’

Her aunt relented, and Sarah went.

The next morning Geraldine was nowhere to be found. Her bed had not been slept in. Her mother cried:

‘Where is Sarah Collinson? They are only gone out walking again.’

‘In this weather?’ suggested Catherine; ‘see how wet it is!’

‘That would not keep Geraldine in if she had the fancy. Go to the beach, I implore you, Catherine.’

Catherine obeyed, and returned as she went. Mrs. Faulkner fainted. Catherine now thought that the best plan would be to see Sir Francis, and communicate their alarm to him. He promised to set out, if necessary, to Mr. Faulkner, but first went round the town, made inquiries at various places, and discovered that at one rather obscure hotel a young foreigner, answering precisely to Catherine’s description of Ippolito, had passed a night and a day, and had departed the preceding evening; no further clue was obtained to his proceedings. Agnes was the only person who had a remark to make which afforded scope for speculation. She looked much puzzled, and at first rather pleased at the bustle of her brother’s approaching departure; but when she caught some words which explained to her that

Geraldine was gone too, and no one knew where, she assumed a look of wisdom, and said: 'She wished me good-bye.'

This speech arrested Sir Francis's attention, and he spent some time in endeavouring to extract its meaning further. The attempt was quite vain; there was no more in it than that Agnes now recalled Geraldine's passionate caresses and tears on the preceding day as a leave-taking. Sir Francis set out, leaving Mrs. Faulkner in a state bordering on distraction, and Lady Rivers much disposed to play the part of one of Job's comforters. Before his departure, he said to his mother:

'Of course you will go to that poor thing. It won't be of any use to talk to her now of the past and its follies,' he added.

'They are quite irretrievable, no doubt,' replied Lady Rivers; she intended to recur to them when Mrs. Faulkner should be less hysterical, but contented herself for the moment with delivering a long lecture to Jemima, who was as little likely to imitate poor Geraldine in her offence as she was able to emulate her charms.





CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I see the play so lies
That I must bear a part.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE good-humoured complacency of Sir Francis Rivers was no doubt disconcerted by the overthrow of the influence which he had flattered himself he was gaining over Geraldine's mind. But as it was not merely the gratification of counselling, directing, and listening to a beautiful girl, alike fitted to excite pity and love, which had led him to profess a brother's solicitude in her welfare, he needed not the further appeal of her mother's tears to induce him to set off at once to London, to consult with Mr. Faulkner as to what might be done for her now. As he pursued his journey, he could think of little else but her who occasioned it.

'Is it possible that the emotion which she evinced only the other evening, the feeling with which she responded to my inquiry, whether she would not have valued a brother and a friend had she happily possessed one, could have been feigned? Absurd supposition! so young—so consummate an actress—it cannot be. I never will believe that she has had any settled plan, any long concealment. She is all impulse, and in one mad moment has left us. If I can overtake—can recal her to her senses—and to her mother, who, with all her want of judgment has none of affection—this shall be my object. But my uncle, how will he tolerate this signal act of rebellion and ingratitude? He is not a man who forgives easily. I believe that his heart was

set on this girl; that he really did regard her as his daughter. And she has scattered his past kindness and his future hopes to the winds. I know not what to plead for her, nor how to mollify him. Perhaps to place no restriction on his blame, to offer no opposition to his anger, will be the best course to pursue at the outbreak.' With these intentions, Sir Francis sought his uncle at his counting-house.

'Glad to see you,' was the greeting he received. 'Very much engaged this morning. If you want to speak with me, go into that room—find to-day's paper on the table—won't keep you waiting longer than I can help.'

'No, don't,' said Sir Francis.

His uncle looked him in the face, a dark shade of apprehension passing over his own. He exchanged a word with his clerk, still retaining his hold on Sir Francis's arm, then led him into the room he had indicated, closed the door, and said:

'Something wrong; what is it?'

'Geraldine,' replied Sir Francis, and stopped.

'Good God! ill—in danger?' exclaimed Mr. Faulkner; 'take down advice, the best, instantly.'

'Not ill,' returned Sir Francis; 'she has left her mother's house—'

'With the Count?'

'We fear so.'

Mr. Faulkner took one rapid turn in the small room:

'Then she shall never enter it again as long as I am the master of it——'

'Stop, stop; no rash vow, I beg. It was but last night; we may not be too late—we may recover her. Can you give me the slightest clue for her pursuit?'

'I believed him and his mother to be in Paris.'

'Shall I go down to Dover, and cross instantly? I wish such a tempest were blowing as would scare them both out of their wits.'

'But there is not,' said Mr. Faulkner, drily; 'and they are across the Channel.'

‘At any rate, if you can suggest no better course, I shall take this,’ continued Sir Francis.

‘I have no counsel nor opinion to give; I have done with her.’ Probably Mr. Faulkner would not have said so, but he plainly saw that Sir Francis had not.

‘How is Diane?’

‘Distracted.’

‘Of course,’ replied Mr. Faulkner, bitterly.

‘My mother is with her.’

‘That is well. If you will go to Paris, draw for what sum you like, Rivers.’

He shook his nephew’s hand, and Sir Francis, as he returned the pressure, knew what the stern, rigid man felt and concealed. Mr. Faulkner sent to Madame Baldovini’s lawyer for her address in Paris.

Neither at Dover nor at Calais could Sir Francis learn any tidings of those of whom he was in search. Still not knowing what to do better, he resolved to proceed to Paris, writing first to Mr. Faulkner, and acquainting him with the fruitlessness of his inquiries hitherto. His journey was completed at a late hour of the day; he drove at once to Madame Baldovini’s apartments in the *Champs Elysées*. She was gone to the *Opéra Comique*.

‘Cool,’ thought Sir Francis. ‘Is her son in Paris?’

‘No, he left it more than a week since.’

‘Is he expected back?’

The porter, the only person visible, could not tell. Sir Francis gave his card, writing on it a request to see Madame Baldovini that evening, and then went away till the hour at which the porter thought Madame would return, ‘unless she had engagements after the theatre; of that he knew nothing, how should he?’ It was near midnight before Sir Francis could obtain this interview, but with patient good humour he carried his point. Madame Baldovini received him in a very elegant dress, and he was struck by her beauty and fashionable appearance. She held his card in her hand:

‘Mr. Faulkner’s nephew, I believe?’

Sir Francis assented, and apologised for his intrusion and want of ceremony.

‘No doubt there is sufficient reason for anything that may appear unceremonious,’ replied the lady, graciously. ‘May I ask it?’

‘The reason is indeed very sufficient,’ he said. ‘I come from Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner, to ask you if you can give any tidings of their daughter.’

‘Of Geraldine Eustace? How is this possible? What can you mean? What tidings do they need?’

Her tone was one of ignorance as well as of confusion. There was more in this than the straightforward Sir Francis could fathom.

‘May I ask where your son is at present?’ he inquired.

‘Not in Paris.’

‘But where?’

‘I really cannot tell you. What has this to do with Geraldine—with your coming hither? Sir Francis, I intreat you, relieve my apprehensions!’

Madame Baldovini sank on the sofa.

‘I wish that I could,’ replied Sir Francis; ‘but I can tell you no more than that Miss Eustace has left her mother’s house at Brighton, and I came hither, believing that we were more likely to find her here than elsewhere.’

Madame Baldovini started up in the utmost agitation, feigned or real.

‘If Ippolito be concerned in this, it is wholly without my knowledge or my approbation. I can assure you, Sir Francis, had I even suspected such a design, I would have laid on him every command, by which I could have hoped to exact submission, to relinquish it. It brings dishonour on our name; it does indeed; I am grieved beyond measure. I have never sanctioned his addressing Miss Eustace in any mode whatsoever since my last interview with Mr. Faulkner. I speak to you frankly. My son left me without any acknowledgment of the purpose you attribute to him; he

wrote a few lines calculated to relieve me of anxiety; he spoke of a speedy return, but I have as yet heard nothing of him. I cannot bring myself to credit what would wound me so deeply as that he should have repaid your uncle's hospitality so ill. If Mr. Faulkner could have been prevailed on to view the subject differently, of course I should have been delighted. I saw my child's happiness at stake; but from the moment that I was convinced of—pardon me—the strength of the prejudices against us, I yielded. I am sure that Mr. Faulkner must do me the justice to corroborate my words. I am distressed, upset.' Madame Baldovini raised a beautiful lace handkerchief to her face. Sir Francis tried to utter some consolatory phrases, but the tide of grief was eloquent, and the lady continued, 'I am very thankful that poor Diane has such a friend as you in her distress—very thankful myself to meet with sympathy. Will you breakfast with me? I shall be unspeakably grateful if you will. Some light may dawn on this sad affair; and on whose judgment, whose honour, whose zeal can I rely but yours?'

Sir Francis thought it best to acquiesce in this proposal, and therefore wished her good night, with the engagement of returning the next morning.

Madame Baldovini, who had been forced to recognise with mortification that she had overrated her powers of persuasion with Mr. Faulkner, hoped to succeed better with Sir Francis Rivers, and met him in the morning resolved not to allow him to leave Paris till she had ascertained whether her son had indeed taken a step which she could honestly say was without her knowledge or approbation, but which left her no better alternative than to secure the intercession of Sir Francis with his uncle.

For his part, Sir Francis knew not what he could do otherwise than remain where tidings were sure to reach him. He wrote to Mr. Faulkner, and allowed Madame Baldovini meantime to exert all her powers

to render Paris agreeable to him. He looked forward not without satisfaction to reinstatement in the post (which of all others he loved) of setting everything that was wrong to rights, restoring every one who was provoked to good humour; and to happiness who was in trouble. But where were Ippolito and Geraldine?

This Sir Francis learned when, on the third evening after his arrival in Paris, on repairing to Madame Baldovini's *hôtel garni*, he found a travelling carriage unloading in the court, and a lady's-maid superintending the process. Inquiring of the porter, who was now familiar with his face, what this meant, he was told that the Conte Ippolito had arrived, bringing with him a '*charmante jeune dame, et voilà la femme de chambre.*' Sir Francis Rivers saw at a glance that she was English.

'Sarah Collinson!' he pronounced, and the girl started in astonishment. She recognised Sir Francis well enough, though he did not know her person, and only hazarded the address.

She dropped the box which she had in her hand, and would have ran into the house; but Sir Francis checked her, and asked, in a manner which showed that he would bear no trifling:

'Where is your mistress?'

'Oh! upstairs, I suppose.'

'With the Count's mother?'

'I am sure I don't know.'

'Where do you come from?'

'We have been at Antwerp.'

'What then?'

'Why, my mistress was married there.'

Sir Francis asked no more questions, but sprang up the stairs. The door of Madame Baldovini's apartments was open for the servants to pass to and fro. Sir Francis entered unannounced. In the *salon* he found Geraldine, in her travelling dress, and Madame Baldovini. The latter started up on seeing him, advanced to meet him, took both his hands, exclaiming:

‘My dear Sir Francis, you had better come with me into the next room ; I will explain everything to you.’

‘But I must speak to Geraldine herself. For your mother’s sake, Geraldine, I require this.’

Geraldine had sunk trembling on the sofa, pale and faint with agitation.

‘Promise me,’ continued Sir Francis, regardless of Madame Baldovini’s persuasive force.

Geraldine made a gesture of acquiescence, and her mother-in-law cried :

‘She shall, she shall ; but one moment—grant me one moment ; she will recover herself, and it is of importance that I should speak with you.’ She led him away.

Geraldine struggled with the faintness which was overpowering her. She leant her arms upon the table, and bowed down her head on them.

Ippolito entered : ‘*Giralda mia!* what is this ? Thou art fatigued, agitated ?’ He bent tenderly over her.

Geraldine raised her pale face, and murmured, almost inaudibly :

‘Mr. Faulkner’s nephew ; he is in there—with your mother.’

Ippolito started back, the expression of his face changing, with the rapidity of lightning, from love to disdain.

‘Let them come,’ he said ; ‘let them all come !’

‘If they do,’ replied Geraldine, whom her husband’s vehemence in these few days had taught to put some check on her own, ‘they cannot harm us, and we surely should conciliate them.’

‘Conciliate !’ replied Ippolito, fiercely. ‘Would you counsel me to forget my honour ? Remember that your relations have scorned me as an adventurer—as—’

‘Stop, stop, dearest Ippolito. Do not repeat wrongs which exasperate you, and which I cannot bear to hear of. It will be very different with Sir Francis ; I know it will. I told you he was the only one, save Catherine,

who showed me consideration in my loneliness, my misery.'

'No doubt he loved you himself!' exclaimed Ippolito, with fresh kindled wrath.

'No, no, he did not; he pitied me; he would have served me; perhaps he will now. I have promised to see him.'

'What! You have spoken with him?' asked Ippolito, with growing jealousy.

'Only now as he passed—'

'You shall never see him again but in my presence,' replied Ippolito. 'You are ill; you shall not stay here.' And he carried rather than led her to another apartment.

The tone of jealousy which he had assumed filled Geraldine with new terrors. She clung convulsively to him:

'You must stay with me, or where you go I will go. I shall die if you quit me, Ippolito.'

'I will not,' he answered, passionately. 'There will be time enough for this *militaire Inglese*.'

Meanwhile Madame Baldovini was describing to Sir Francis her consternation on the sudden arrival of Ippolito and Geraldine:

'The door opened, my son entered, leading in Geraldine, placed her in my arms, and said, '*Ecco la tua figlia*.' Poor child! she clung to my neck, and sobbed out, 'Forgive me—oh! forgive me! You are his mother—be mine!' Ippolito was on his knees, kissing my hand and shedding tears; and I, Sir Francis, I am a poor fool on an occasion like this—indeed I am!' Here the lace handkerchief was in requisition. 'What could I say? I was very angry with these foolish young things, and both looked so handsome, and so penitent, and so pleased with what they had done all the while. Oh! Sir Francis!' and Madame Baldovini clasped her hands imploringly; 'you can soften Mr. Faulkner; I place all my confidence in you!'

‘I should like to hear anything that you can tell me of their flight,’ replied Sir Francis, with a little more self-possession than Madame Baldovini had intended him to retain.

‘I only know as yet that Ippolito, dreading pursuit, took the vessel to Antwerp, as thinking that least likely to be suspected. There the ceremony was performed. He sought out an English clergyman of your persuasion, as well as a Catholic priest. So, you see, all the scruples of her family have been attended to, and Geraldine is his wife ; it is irrevocable.’ Madame Baldovini folded her hands in an attitude of the meekest resignation, Sir Francis meanwhile thinking : ‘If I don’t see Geraldine now, she will be completely tutored before she meets me. I should like to get a little at the truth of her character, if there be any truth in it, (and I never beheld a more ingenuous countenance,) before I move any further in this affair. This woman is nothing but an actress, I fear.’

Sir Francis repeated his desire for an interview with Geraldine ; apologising for his intrusion, but trusting that the peculiar circumstances in which all were placed justified it.

‘Oh ! certainly ; I know not what I should do without you to look to. If you will remain here, I will go to Geraldine and communicate your wish. She may be too much overcome to see you ; but depend upon me, I will do what I can.’





CHAPTER XXXIX.

I would your spirit were easier for advice.

SHAKESPEARE.

MADAME BALDOVINI found Geraldine wild with alarm at the thought of a meeting between her husband and Sir Francis Rivers.

‘He is gone! he is gone!’ she cried, when Madame Baldovini entered.

‘No, he is not,’ replied Madame Baldovini; then perceiving how much Geraldine’s agitation was increased since she had seen her, she added, in a voice meant to soothe: ‘Quiet yourself, my dear child. There is nothing to alarm you in Sir Francis Rivers; he is kindness itself; you will find him a true friend. He particularly desires to see you before he quits the house, and I have promised that if possible you will comply.’

‘But she shall not,’ interrupted Ippolito; ‘she shall never see him except with me, and in her present state not at all. Do you want to kill her?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied his mother, with contempt in her tone; all her suppressed anger on the brink of explosion. ‘What does this mean? But the whole affair is yours. You have conducted it admirably hitherto. Go on to the end; no doubt you will be completely successful. I shall have to congratulate you speedily on restored peace and prosperity.’

Geraldine gazed on her, not understanding this irony, and, like a child, exclaimed:

‘And all depends on my seeing Sir Francis! Oh! Ippolito, I implore you, permit me to go to him.’

What can you fear? What arguments could draw me from you? Who could wish to do so? Let me go.'

'I will accompany you, then,' said Ippolito.

Madame Baldovini placed herself between them and the door: 'No, no,' she said; 'folly and insolence would only incense him. I see the humour you are in. Let Geraldine go alone, or I will return, and tell Sir Francis that she is unequal to speak with him.'

'But I am not,' interrupted Geraldine. 'Oh! Ippolito, why are you so cruel?'

'Go, then,' said Ippolito, tossing her hand from him. She looked reproachfully on him, but went.

Geraldine trembled so violently when she reached the door of the room in which she knew Sir Francis Rivers to be, that she could scarcely enter; and when she did so, would have sunk to the ground, had not Sir Francis, perceiving her agitation, come to her side, and led her to a seat.

'My mother!' were the only words she faltered when she could command speech; she felt a shame and remorse reviving which she had hitherto almost lost the sense of. in the joy of being Ippolito's beyond recall, and did not dare to look towards Sir Francis as she spoke.

'I left her as wretched as your desertion must necessarily make her,' replied Sir Francis.

Geraldine answered not; one suffocated sob reached his ear.

'Oh! Geraldine, falseness was the last fault I expected of you.'

'Falseness!' cried Geraldine; 'how? when? I deceived no one; I told them that I would never submit; I took the only step they left me. You cannot judge between me and them, nor do you know Ippolito; you have never seen him, or you would understand that I could not relinquish the heart he had once given me. I knew too well the value of the gift! Only tell my mother that if she would forgive me, I should be the happiest creature in the world!' And Geraldine now

raised her face proudly, beaming with delight and hope; a cloud of pain and disappointment quickly overshadowed it as she met Sir Francis's reproving eye, and with impetuosity she added: 'But if she close her heart to me, tell her she plants the only thorn in my path, and tortures her child, who would otherwise be most blessed. She never denied me aught before. How could she now strive to wrest my existence from me? Oh! it was not right! it was not wise! Tell her so from me.'

'Do you think that she could make no reply? Is this the way you ask forgiveness? And my uncle, whom you might well have regarded as a father.'

'And did,' cried Geraldine, 'until his barbarous treatment reminded me that no father's pulse beat in his veins. Ippolito—his birth, his rank, his breeding demanded very different treatment from that which he encountered from one whose sordid mind values no possession but that of wealth. Oh! he made me rejoice to know I was not his daughter!'

'Stop, Geraldine, stop; this is far more than I can tolerate; he is my uncle if not your father, and in my presence shall be treated with the respect he merits,' interrupted Sir Francis, indignantly. 'This language has been taught you by one who has the insolence of rank, and is perhaps without any more honourable distinction. Can you for a moment so far forget Mr. Faulkner's noble conduct to your mother as to speak of him thus?'

'Why, why did you begin with reproaches?' said Geraldine, with contrition mixed with resentment. 'If Mr. Faulkner had behaved to Ippolito as I believe you would have behaved, I should not speak as I have spoken; perhaps neither should we have acted as we have.'

Sir Francis knew that Geraldine's reply had some foundation in truth and reason.

'You bestow far too much blame on others, and too little on yourself, Geraldine,' he observed, gravely;

‘and if in this spirit you meet me, it is useless to attempt reconciliation. I quit you therefore; yet, before I start for England, I will see you once more. Consider well what has passed between us, and what you desire for the future. Now, good night.’

He was gone before Geraldine could determine whether she wished to detain him, or even to meet again.

‘Is this possible?’ she exclaimed, when she found herself alone; ‘I came here so frightened, I felt as if sinking into the ground, and I spoke to Ippolito of conciliating, and meant to have said nothing but to entreat my mother’s forgiveness—and now—. And Madame Baldovini—she never supposed that I should thus provoke and anger one willing to befriend me!’—

She sank down on a seat stupified. At length Ippolito, no longer to be restrained, came to seek her; his mother followed him.

‘Where is this Englishman?’ he asked.

Geraldine started, threw herself into his arms, and burst into a flood of tears, which brought some relief to her.

‘Has he been gone long?’ inquired Madame Baldovini.

‘I don’t know—I think so,’ replied Geraldine.

‘You shall not be tormented by his presence again,’ said Ippolito, soothing her.

‘Oh! it is not that—it is myself—it is something here—in my own heart—which makes me feel so miserable.’

When Geraldine was able to explain more distinctly to her husband what had passed between her and Sir Francis, her conduct was so consonant with Ippolito’s own feelings that he was in better humour than he had been since he first heard the Englishman’s name. He remained firm however in his refusal to allow her to see him again alone, and Sir Francis was forced to depart for England, after an interview in which both Madame Baldovini and her son appeared, and which, consequently, bore very little fruit. Ippolito, refusing

to speak English, took rather a silent part in it, and Sir Francis could form little judgment of him, beyond recognising that his proud bearing and handsome person were very likely to prepossess Geraldine in his favour. He retained his first opinion that Geraldine had been cruelly trifled with, and that all who had taken part in the affair owed her some reparation. He also distrusted Madame Baldovini's professions more than that lady imagined; and if he set out with the resolution of doing what he could to restore Geraldine to favour, he was influenced by his still lively interest in her frank, rebellious spirit, rather than by any of *la Marianna's* persuasions.





CHAPTER XL.

She is peevish, sullen, froward,
Proud, disobedient, stubborn, lacking duty ;
And may I say to thee, this pride of hers
Upon advice hath drawn my love from her.
Then let her beauty be her wedding dower,
Since me and my possessions she esteems not.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE Sir Francis was communicating the tidings which he had procured to his uncle, he watched the gloom on his countenance grow darker as he listened ; and as soon as Mr. Faulkner perceived that his nephew, having exhausted his intelligence, had intercessions in reserve, he cut short the discourse, thanking him for his exertions, and saying :

‘All I beg is that the name of Baldovini may never be mentioned to me again. Except from Diane, I shall not endure to hear them. To impose such a restriction on so weak a nature might be impracticable, or if practicable, mischievous. What I cannot obviate, that I must tolerate.’

‘Her mother surely cannot dismiss the subject thus,’ began Sir Francis.

‘I did not say that I could take it on myself to regulate Mrs. Faulkner’s conduct to her child ; her conduct as my wife I shall of course direct. She may see her daughter when and where she will, but never again under my roof ; she may correspond with her as she pleases, but the intelligence which she obtains must be received solely for her own satisfaction. I wish to hold no communication with them further.’

Mr. Faulkner was inflexible. Lady Rivers could not but admire his firmness and his assertion of dignity. She observed :

‘If poor Diane had possessed a little of his spirit, things would have gone on very differently.’

Sir Francis was more disgusted by his mother’s hardness than he had ever expected to be, and doubted whether severity would prove less dangerous to Geraldine in her present mood than had over indulgence in the past. Not even Mrs. Faulkner was as yet placable ; she felt keenly Geraldine’s haughty treatment. ‘Not one kind word, not one token of affection has she bestowed on me from the day I first displeased her by opposing her wayward will.’

‘She was little accustomed to meet with opposition from you, ma’am,’ replied Catherine.

‘The more cause for submission. She must have known what it cost me to refuse her anything,—that I never could do so without the most powerful reasons.’

‘But she knew she had often overcome reason before, and it is not those who are seldomest under restraint who bear it best.’

‘No, no, I see my mistake. I have been too kind, too fond a mother. I sacrificed myself in everything, and her in nothing. It does not do. Just see how those Owens are willing to yield to their mother, to set themselves quite aside ; while Geraldine never bestowed a thought on me. When I told her that marriage with an Italian would separate her from me for ever, she merely answered, ‘Do you want me to stay here and die?’ When I bid her at least to prove Ippolito’s love by time, she said, ‘He loves me now, and you urge me to give that affection which I prize most on earth time to chill ; I won’t trifle with my all.’ Yes, I was nothing to her.’

Thus murmured Mrs. Faulkner hour after hour, but solely to Catherine. Others she would not invite to censure her daughter—or herself. Catherine heard, and answered, always with sympathy, but never with

full assent. She strove to open Mrs. Faulkner's eyes to see things truly. Sometimes, when, hoping that she laboured not without a measure of success, she was checked by the disappointment of hearing Mrs. Faulkner begin again exactly as she had begun before, and repeat what she had recently appeared to relinquish.

Sir Francis Rivers wrote to Madame Baldovini, and gave her the details of his fruitless endeavours. He was not a little surprised at the coldness of her reply. She suspected either that his interest had flagged, or that he had no influence with his uncle, and in the one or other case, thought his friendship little worth the trouble of cultivation.

Sir Francis could not refrain from addressing Geraldine also. He made an allusion to his proffered brotherhood. 'A brother you do not now require. May he whom you have chosen prove to you father, brother, husband, all in one. But, Geraldine, I cannot refrain from telling you that it grieves me to think you could listen to a proposition made with so much sincerity with an appearance of equal candour, and yet all the while deceive the maker of it. You are very young; and though you think that you now want nothing, you may live to want a friend. I fear I must not encourage you to look for one in my uncle, but I can bid you remember that I retain an interest in your future life, if it were only for poor Agnes' sake. She has discovered and has been perplexed by the evident sorrow of all around her. She came yesterday very quietly and seated herself by me, fearful of disturbing me. She often shows wonderful consideration. I was weary and dull enough, I confess. She put her two hands on mine, and whispered, 'Tell me, is Geraldine dead? I do not like to ask any one but you.' 'No, my child,' I replied, with a start. 'Don't be afraid to tell me the truth,' she said, not yet convinced; 'if she be dead, I shall not weep.' 'Shall you not, Agnes?' I asked, with surprise. 'Did you not love her?' 'So much!' said Agnes, looking up to Heaven. 'But

would she not be with the angels, singing among them? They always told me that Mary was gone to a bright and beautiful place; then why not Geraldine? I kissed Agnes, and my only answer was, 'Geraldine is not gone there yet, dear; God grant that we may all one day hear her sweet voice singing among that blessed company!'

Sir Francis next spoke of her mother's illness, and Geraldine wept profusely over his letter.

Ippolito, willing to make any effort to please her, asked what she would have him do. Her only answer was to proffer the letter, which he took, read, and more than ever believed that Sir Francis loved her.

'Take me to my mother,' sobbed Geraldine.

'It is not possible; she would not receive you.'

'She would, she would,' reiterated Geraldine; and she wrote to her mother, imploring to be allowed to see her before Ippolito started for Italy. 'Could you meet me at Dover?—anywhere apart from Mr. Faulkner, who, I hear, will not forgive me, and whom, indeed, dearest mamma, I cannot forgive.'

Geraldine also announced a determination to write a few lines to Sir Francis: 'I cannot bear that he should think me so much false than I was; and I must thank him, for he deserves it, and beg him just to ask Agnes always to keep my name in her prayers. Dear innocent! I would have her do so, and he won't neglect my request.'

Geraldine's exculpation of herself was briefly this: 'I was quite sincere when I had that conversation with you. I did not even know that Ippolito was in England, and I don't think I ever exchanged one word with you after I did know it.'

Mrs. Faulkner positively refused to accede to Geraldine's proposal, and revealed to none but Catherine the motives which really actuated her:

'I cannot bear to see my child merely for a leave-taking; it would agitate me dreadfully; I should be very angry and very sorry. It would be the worst

thing in the world for me to go through all this ; nor would I have her know how ill I am. And then on my return to Mr. Faulkner, to find him so cold and severe, and unwilling to listen to one word I might have to say ; no, I dare not encounter all this, and why should I ? She chose to quit me ; she has her husband and his mother. I dare say that she will be very happy, though we all thought it right to tell her that she would not ; but in order to be very happy she must forget me quite.'

Mrs. Faulkner wept, and then wrote in a manner which conveyed the idea rather of anger than of sorrow.

Geraldine felt the repulse keenly ; she put the letter into her husband's hand and burst into tears. He caught her to his heart, and said, reproachfully :

' You have me, *ma non basta*.'

' *Sì, sì, basta*,' replied Geraldine, hiding her face on his shoulder.

The young Conte and Contessa went to Italy, leaving Madame Baldovini resolved on spending the ensuing winter in Paris.

Mrs. Faulkner, who had been very seriously ill ever since the departure of her daughter, returned to Lascelles as soon as she could support the fatigue of the journey.





CHAPTER XLI.

— To some meek souls is given
To have the things they love, and to rejoice ;
Such as therein forget not things of Heaven,
As using, not abusing ; there hath striven
With thee a stronger spirit, keener bent
On things proposed.

The Baptistery.

G WEN OWEN spent some weeks, after her departure from Lascelles, with her friend Dora, and could she have been happy anywhere, would have been so in her home. In Biddulph Priory tranquillity reigned, and Gwen sorely needed tranquillising. There was much of novelty and interest around that would have filled her with delight, if she had come with a freer spirit than she now possessed. A high tone of refinement and an absence of ostentation were everywhere alike remarkable. The furniture was not half so showy as at Lascelles, observed Gwen, but every room that she entered gave an idea that the occupations and habits of those who inhabited them were of a superior grade.

Dora, in the midst of her own family, extended to her friend a most affectionate welcome, but had not time at her disposal as at Staunton, for she was the frequent companion of her father, often his secretary in the morning, and had different hours allotted to employments in which she was delighted to see Gwen take a share, but which did not leave much leisure for conversations such as they had held under the old lime trees at school. This change Gwen did not altogether regret. To accompany Dora or Mrs. Biddulph to their

schools and the cottages on their estate, to be admitted into Mr. Biddulph's library, allowed to examine the beautiful works of art contained in it, and to gather from him knowledge which he readily imparted when he saw it truly desired—all this Gwen preferred just now to more intimate communion with Dora, for she had not as yet dared to probe the wounds of her spirit even with her own hand. While Gwen admired and approved of all at Biddulph Priory, she did not refrain from drawing comparisons greatly to the disadvantage of Lascelles. How rationally time was employed here ! How all things found their true level ! Trifles remained trifles, and things of importance received their due attention. Gwen felt herself understood, appreciated, neither blindly admired as at Lascelles, nor at the same time galled by finding herself an object of dread, perhaps of dislike. 'Gwen is so clever !'—Mrs. Faulkner's frequent exclamation—had tended to increase her conceit, and her love of saying cutting things, and excited a feeling in her that, if she could not be loved, why then she must be feared. She had a sort of pride in possessing an influence which could not be escaped. But at the Priory it was very different ; Gwen never forgot the look of surprise which came across Mrs. Biddulph's calm, dignified countenance when once, in her presence, she hazarded a caustic remark.

'Perhaps you will think that I ought to have told you before, Gwen,' said Dora, bending down her blushing cheek on Gwen's shoulder, 'but really I could not. I could not write it ; I don't think I could say anything now if he were not coming so very soon—next week, you know.'

And Gwen, as she listened, wondered she could have been so long in finding out that Dora was to be Lord St. Ruth's bride, and was willing to believe Hugh's friend was worthy of her own. She was very quiet and observant when Lord St. Ruth came ; but when he met her cordially for Dora's sake and for Hugh's,

how could Gwen retain a chilling reserve? She came out of herself, lost herself in those around her, and speedily felt happier.

A week before Mrs. Owen's arrival in England, Hugh came to the Priory to fetch away his sister and take her to London, to prepare for their mother's reception. It was the Easter vacation for him and for Lord St. Ruth, and after its conclusion they had yet another term to keep at Oxford. Dora was to be married in the autumn; Mr. Biddulph's guardianship would then be over. Hugh admired Dora as much as Gwen could desire, and rejoiced in his friend's happiness; but he knew the comparison which Gwen inwardly drew between her friend and her cousin, and this knowledge caused a painful constraint between them. He spoke little of Lascelles; and Gwen, influenced by more feelings than one, spared him and herself much mention of the Baldovini.

'It is impossible for you to stay longer now, I know, Gwen; I am glad that you have been here,' said Dora. 'It is very pleasant now that we all know each other. When I come to London in May, then I shall see Mrs. Owen also.'

'You are better, dearest mother? She is better, Hugh, is she not?' cried Gwen, embracing her mother, drawing back to gaze on her with fond scrutiny, then straining her to her heart again.

'Certainly better, my dear children,' was Mrs. Owen's cheerful, grateful answer.

'And here 'we three have met again!'' said Gwen. 'Ah! this takes us back to our little room at Winchester; there are many changes since then, no doubt; the pleasantest, dearest mother, is the improvement in your looks.'

Hugh had but a day or two left to welcome his mother home, before he was recalled to Oxford. He sat quietly by her side, while Gwen was occupied in the

arrangements necessary for her comfort, putting everything *en train* for their future mode of life.

‘Don’t think of me, Hugh,’ she said; ‘I shall have her every day when you are gone, and now let her enjoy your society as much as possible.’

Gwen was so full of life, spirit, and good humour, that Hugh scarcely knew her to be the same pale, reserved little girl, who had moved silently, sometimes gloomily, about Lascelles. He told his mother that he rejoiced to see her so much happier than she then seemed; ‘and I am not afraid,’ he added, ‘but that this will last. Of course she will find trials and difficulties in her course, but I think she will be better able to encounter them than those she has already experienced.’

‘Ah! poor Gwen,’ replied Mrs. Owen; ‘I never felt sure that she was happy at Lascelles, but she would have been most averse to quit it; she has accomplished one of the purposes of her going there fully, and I hope that others were not neglected.’

‘I don’t think that Gwen and Geraldine ever suited, or understood each other,’ said Hugh.

‘I am sorry for that. Had a solid friendship been the result of their companionship, it might have proved beneficial to each. Unless drawn together by such a bond, their line of life will probably run wide apart. Does it not seem strange that Geraldine should not have written once to your sister since she left Lascelles?’

‘And Gwen?’

‘She wrote soon after she reached the Priory, as Geraldine desired.’

‘You know, dear mother, that Geraldine has been indulged in everything; she is thoughtless, and capricious, perhaps.’ Hugh ended with a sigh.

‘When you were at Lascelles during Christmas, you spoke of her generous and ardent nature.’

‘Well, mother, we shall see all her nobler qualities come out at last.’ And Hugh smiled hopefully this time.



CHAPTER XLII.

Now another day is come,
Fitter hope and nobler doom.

WORDSWORTH.

—— In my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep.

SHAKESPEARE.

AND now the great truth of Gwen's life was accomplished; her task, her servitude, as she had sometimes in too proud a spirit termed it, over, the reward of fortitude and perseverance about to be received. She could remember moments in which she had barely resisted the impulse to cast her burden down, to burst her bonds in sunder; and she trembled at the narrowness of her escape. What, if she had recklessly destroyed the labour of months and of years, by one moment's frenzy of intolerance! She thanked her God that He had strengthened her, supported her, and not suffered her so greatly to fall. The very circumstances which had once galled her almost insupportably, appeared in retrospection quite inadequate to justify the abandonment of an honourable, deliberate purpose. How utterly weak and contemptible, if not worse, to have sacrificed it to resentment of the whims of a spoiled child.

After an honest examination, Gwen pronounced herself not unequal to discharge the work which she was about to undertake. She entertained plans of diligent improvement, and resolved to devote every spare hour to this object; for she esteemed herself at the commencement of all she designed to effect, and her ardent spirit rejoiced as she contemplated the expanse before

her. She had exquisite enjoyment in books, painting, and music, and trusted that she could not long live in London without becoming acquainted with many of like tastes and far superior attainments, who would lead her on to the excellence which they had already reached.

‘With a little, a very little of such society, and constant home communion with my dearest mother, how can I fail to be happy far beyond my deserts, if not beyond my desires?’ exclaimed Gwen. And if thoughts of a different sort of happiness came in, why the two could not have co-existed; and had each been hers to choose, would not the worthier selection have been of that which she retained?

Gwen was sincere in esteeming her present blessings too great for her deserts, and seeing so much as she did see to reprehend in her past conduct, she trembled lest she should not be permitted to retain them. She experienced the nervous sensations of a person recently snatched from the brink of a precipice, startling her from sleep at night, and giving her a feverish restlessness by day. She had a dream-like feeling, with a constant dread of waking. ‘Am I really with you, mother?’ she would say, and her mother sought to soothe her with gentle caution.

But Gwen could not be soothed; for she knew, what her mother suspected not, that there was something unsound, unhealthy, which required correction, and which, unless met from within, might justly draw upon her chastisement from without. Then it was that her prayers were timid, and her spirit knew not peace.

Mrs. Owen was grieved and perplexed; she had looked to see the first excitement of change subside, and her child in the enjoyment of a temperate and enduring satisfaction; but Gwen did not feel sufficiently at ease to venture on repose. Constant employment of body and mind seemed the only safeguard against tormenting thoughts. She could not rest. Her mother saw this, and was alarmed.

‘My child,’ she said one evening, when Gwen’s pale cheek, and bright, wakeful eye disquieted her, ‘I am sure that you are making yourself ill. That would be a sad interruption to our present comfort. Moderate your exertions that you may prolong them.’

Gwen had foreseen this address, and was prepared for it. She had a hard struggle for self-command, but she would not go from the determination which she had made. She pushed aside her books, and seated herself by the arm of her mother’s sofa.

‘I would be quiet, mother, if I could,’ she said.

‘You will bring on a fever, Gwen,’ replied her mother, starting with alarm.

‘No, I hope not. But I feel that I shall never have peace until I have spoken to you with plainness of the past; told you everything, all that I know of myself—made you know your child—your poor, erring child better, very differently from what you do now. It is your praise which pains me, your unmerited trust which I dare not accept. I am going to incur your blame, mother; I am aware of that, but, oh! I feel I can rely on your love, and when I plead for your forgiveness in all the disappointment I am about to cause you, and lay my head on your bosom, and ask you to pray God to forgive me too, and to guide me to better things, you will soothe me into a peace sweeter than any of the feverish joy I have tasted since I regained my home.’

‘What, Gwen,’ said her mother, sorrowfully, ‘am I only now receiving your confidence?’

‘Oh! mother,’ replied Gwen, kissing her cheek tenderly, ‘how gladly would my heart always have bestowed it! but (and she looked perplexed) it seemed as if it could not be—as if at no time I was fully authorized to tell you all which passed around and within me. Care for you often prevented a revelation of either; then the storm within seemed so disproportioned to that without—such wrathful feelings boiling in me for a cause which, if repeated, would never have appeared

capable of exciting them—trifles light as air, melting away if I strove to grasp them. But, mother, don't you know when the skin has been burnt and blistered, how insufferable a feather's weight is on the wound? How could I tell you all this when you thought me patient and happy? Or to what purpose declare it, unless to be withdrawn from a position which I earnestly desired to retain? And now, mother, I have my hard-won reward, but with it such a portion of self-reproach, that I fear lest I should be summoned to resign what I do not deserve to enjoy, and I feel that I should be unwilling to submit to a decree, the justice of which I must acknowledge. This again makes me doubt whether there be sincerity in my repentance, or whether it be anything more than dread of punishment. I feel that I could welcome any sentence but one which would forbid the accomplishment of my great object.' Gwen paused. 'What resignation, what contrition is there in all this? Oh! mother, did you ever guess how undisciplined, how unbroken my spirit is?'

'No,' replied her mother, sadly. 'I did not know *all* the vehemence which lies under your ordinarily calm exterior. I knew that the strength of your feelings would be one of the great trials of your life, but I did not know that they had yet been so fully developed, nor did I imagine that you had cause for as much self-reproach as you express. On the contrary, I thought, and am inclined to believe still, my child, that much in your past conduct has deserved my warmest approbation.' Gwen's head was hung down in shame.

'Speak more particularly to me; not in these vague and exaggerated terms. You will find (and it will be salutary), that some of those things which haunt and torment you will prove, as you approach near, really as you said, trifles light as air, not matters of deep remorse.'

'Ah! all are not trifles that I have to tell; and those which I might be content to call such, if they had never been followed by anything worse, I now plainly perceive were the beginnings, the indications

of that wrong frame of mind and temper, that false tone of feeling, in which my greatest temptations assailed me. I must explain to you how Geraldine galled, how Mrs. Faulkner failed to win me ; how Catherine soothed, counselled, guided me. In that great house, with all those people about me, so many employed in teaching me, to one good, humble servant is it owing almost alone that your poor girl has brought you back any of the right feeling and principle you instilled, anything you can yet love and cherish,' said Gwen, with pathos in her tone, which touched her mother to the heart.

'God bless her, my dearest ; and you,' she added, her voice sinking to a whisper.

'He does bless her, and He will,' answered Gwen ; 'she is His faithful servant.'

'You have always told me that this kind creature loved Geraldine also.'

'Oh, yes ! she loved Geraldine much more than she loved me ; and of all my cousin's possessions, I coveted none so much as that of a higher place in Catherine's affections. It seemed but just that when she approved me more she should also love me better, but she did not.'

'Why, Geraldine had been cherished from a child, and what do you think she would have felt if you, a little stranger, had displaced her from her old post in Catherine's heart ?'

'I know what I should have felt,' said Gwen, thoughtfully ; 'I don't know exactly how it would have affected Geraldine. She would not have discovered her loss easily ; she was thoroughly confident that she must always be first, and I second, in everything in which she cared to have the larger share.' Gwen went on and gave a rapid detail of many of the circumstances of her daily life at Lascelles, which revealed to Mrs. Owen its trials and its pains as they never had been placed before her till then. She sighed as she listened. 'And now, mother, you know when

Hugh came to see us? Did he say anything to you of that visit?

‘Not much; enough to make me glad to have you home again.’

Gwen was silent for a few moments; then said, hastily:

‘Well, never mind now what Hugh said; I will tell you exactly all that passed while he was with us.’ With a minuteness which showed that every circumstance was, as it were, burnt into the tablets of her heart, she told her dismay, her agony, as day by day she watched Geraldine entangle in her net the single-hearted, generous Hugh. ‘And I, I swept the meshes away—all at one fell swoop as it were. Mother, only listen.’ And she disclosed how she had found Hugh musing over his Spenser—how she had placed herself before him. ‘Oh! very little like a guardian angel must I have looked, or felt, at that moment. I unmasked Geraldine’s arts and flatteries, and felt the while as if I were doing a great work, and as if I had one single motive—his preservation. But, mother, there is the sting; I can’t feel that now. I am conscious that there was a long treasured-up animosity in my heart—that it was not only love which made me speak; love could not have filled me with all the bitter sarcasm, nor have inspired all the proud wrath with which I summoned Catherine, and forced her to bear unwilling testimony to my truth. She was too candid to dispute what I advanced; for, I thank God—Oh! how I thank Him from the very bottom of my heart (and Gwen sank upon her knees, and raised her hands and eyes to heaven in irrepressible emotion) that in an hour of tumultuous feeling for Hugh and for myself, I did not lie!’

‘My child, my dear child!’ said Mrs. Owen, leaning forward, and burying her face on her daughter’s neck, ‘let us thank Him!’

For awhile both were silent. The next words were spoken by Gwen, in a suffocated voice:

‘I don’t think Catherine ever can have loved me from that day. Besides, thenceforth I grew worse—harder—prouder ; yet she did show me much kindness and affection when I came away, and she was too true to express the last if it had not existed.’

‘My poor child, she must have pitied you.’

‘Yes, mother, I dare say that she did.’ The tears started into Gwen’s eyes. ‘I see now that I was and am very pitiable. I did not use to like pity ; now I am thankful for it.’

Her mother looked on her with love.

‘I have more to tell yet,’ said Gwen, timidly, ‘unless I am tiring you—making you ill.’

‘No, go on. I would rather hear all now. It is better for you and for me than beginning afresh. I could not sleep to-night if I thought there were anything untold.’

‘Nor I with anything untold,’ thought Gwen ; and she began rapidly to describe the arrival of the Baldovini, and the persons and characters of the mother and the son.

Mrs. Owen perceived a shade of embarrassment steal over her face and tone as she spoke of the sort of meteor-like talent and beauty of Ippolito.

‘There, mother, you see I began to find myself out—to know myself better ; and the more I felt humiliated by my own discoveries and by the slights of others, the more wrathful and dissatisfied did I become,—the more unamiable, the less likely to be loved. Ippolito discovered my irritability ; (a hot, angry spot of colour began to burn on Gwen’s cheek ;) he loved to tease me ; and oh ! how well an Italian can do that, or anything else he sets himself to. Geraldine was amused, and she teased me too, resuming her old methods and inventing new ones with him, till I was almost wild. It was more than I could bear. But all this was nothing ; (blushes dyed her face and neck of the deepest crimson, and she raised her eyes no more as she hurried on ;) all this was nothing to the secret

knowledge that what chiefly galled me was to watch his daily increasing admiration for Geraldine. There was a time when I listened to the enthusiasm with which he would speak of genius, as if he worshipped it as the only object worthy of adoration. There was a spell in his language and in his voice, and I thought as I heard that surely I could reveal to him more, far more responding to these high aspirations than anything that Geraldine—beautiful, giddy, superficial—could ever offer.’ She pressed her hands on her heart, and for a moment paused as if for breath. ‘For the first time since I had been at Lascelles, I fancied that there was one near who could understand me. One day he read to me part of *Corinne*; we were alone, and I listened as I had never listened to anything before, and Geraldine came in singing. ‘Oh! you dull creatures,’ she cried, ‘you must not read any more if I come.’ She went up to the piano and began a song; for that song he left me; and it was always so afterwards—I saw it, I knew it from that time. One look at her beauty, one note of her voice, and what was all my hidden store as I fancied it,—never brought out of the treasure cave,—never unsunned except for him—compared to those? Nothing. So what had been for awhile very sweet turned to gall; what might have been love, soon, very soon grew to be wrath. I knew not exactly why I was brought forward in an unusual degree, and Geraldine made to retire. But Ippolito met me first with coldness, then with positive rudeness. Mother, how was I to bear that? In my heart I accused him of hypocrisy, and Geraldine of coquetry, for I thought of poor Hugh. I knew every one would be glad when I was gone; at least they would, and Catherine would, and others I did not heed. So one day a crisis came’—Gwen told her passionate conversation with Catherine; ‘I wrote that evening to Dora, and I have never repented of it, mother.’

‘Nor do I, dearest,’ exclaimed Mrs. Owen, as she

thought what a fiery trial her child had passed through, and thankfully recognised that, if not altogether unscathed, she was surely in a measure purified by the ordeal.

‘This more, mother, I have yet to tell,’ continued Gwen. ‘You know yesterday I walked out with Esther.’

‘Yes ; what then ?’

‘Why I went to the Strand to get some colours at the drawing shop. I moved to the door, thinking to match a tint better in the light. I looked up, I don’t know why, as a man in a foreign cloak passed ; he saw me, involuntarily turned back his head for a moment, then hastily went on without one word, one gesture of recognition. Mother, it was Ippolito—I know it was. You see he despises the poor little toiling teacher ; he has now no honour, no respect for me, whom yet he once condescended to flatter. Tomorrow, perhaps, if we meet in some brilliant circle, where my efforts are rewarded with success, then he may vouchsafe to remember me again, approach me, and talk about Lascelles and Geraldine. But I could bear it all—indeed I could—much better since I have told you everything. I have no secret now, and I feel lightened of a burden that crushed me. This has been a blessed evening.’





CHAPTER XLIII.

Les naturels vifs et sensibles sont capables de terribles égaremens ; les passions et les présomptions les entraînent ; mais aussi ils ont de grandes ressources, et reviennent souvent de loin.—FÉNÉLON.

‘**M**OTHER,’ said Gwen, timidly, the next day, ‘I feel I should be much happier if I were to write to Catherine at once, and tell her what I now think of my past conduct ; perhaps she would be able to love me again if she had reason to believe that pride is not always uppermost.’

‘I think it will be for your comfort and for hers that you should do so,’ replied Mrs. Owen.

Gwen wrote her letter, placed it before her mother, and moved away. After a momentary hesitation, Mrs. Owen read it. She was touched by the generous self-condemnation, and still more generous recognition of what was fascinating and admirable in Geraldine’s character, and by the tone of affectionate reverence employed towards Catherine herself. Gwen’s hearty declaration of all she owed her had awakened Mrs. Owen’s gratitude also ; she felt inclined to add a short expression of it, but refrained. ‘It is better just now,’ she thought, ‘to leave Gwen and Catherine to understand each other alone.’ She was pleased to observe in the self-blame, not so much a tone of enthusiastic exaggeration as of sober discrimination.

‘Here is good seed !’ she exclaimed. ‘May the harvest be abundant !’

Gwen sent her letter and waited longer for the reply than she expected. This was trying—nay, more,

wounding. An answer by the next post she had not looked for. Catherine was a reflective person, not fond of replying off-hand in speech, still less with pen and paper. Then, too, she had the duties of her service to discharge, and might have little time at her disposal. But more days than she need reasonably have calculated on elapsed. At last came the worst of all, and that was the letter itself. It was short—so short that it seemed as if it might have been sooner written ; it was constrained—so constrained that, but for one cordial sentence, Gwen could not have told whether Catherine's heart was reconciled to her or not. 'I am very glad that you have spoken plainly with your mother about everything.' The final words were of prayer for her good, which Catherine could never have written but with heartfelt earnestness. Gwen must be satisfied ; she acknowledged that, and said, 'Have I deserved so much as to feel disappointed that I have not more?' She had run to her own room with her letter, and now on returning to her mother, it seemed as if she had little to show. 'But why,' she asked, 'should I expect my tardy confession of my faults to be received as something great and wonderful?' Without indulging herself in further delay, she placed Catherine's letter before her mother. Mrs. Owen read it, and her first words, uttered with some quickness, were :

'I hope nothing is going wrong with them.'

'Why?' asked Gwen, with surprise.

'Because this letter seems to me like one written in pain and uneasiness.'

'I never thought of that,' exclaimed Gwen. 'I suppose I was thinking too much of myself. Poor Catherine ! I do hope she has not anything to trouble her ; if so, how good of her to write to me at all. See, mother, the postmark is Brighton, not Lascelles. I wonder what has taken them there.'

But Gwen's work waited for her, leaving little time for speculation. For five or six hours she was cheer-

fully employed. Gwen liked her pupils, and her pupils liked her. Of course she did not expect to like them all, nor any of them at all times; humorous, dull, or idle each was apt in turn to be. But Gwen felt that she understood children, and could make them understand her, and thus her task and theirs was facilitated. She treasured up with peculiar fondness certain sayings of Catherine to her: 'The poor and the young will always love, where anything loveable exists; nothing will conceal it from them; neither a forbidding exterior, nor a homely dress, nor a dull understanding. Provided it be really there, they will get at it; and if on the contrary, any one thought it worth while to counterfeit with them, they would not long be deceived.' Gwen believed these observations to be well founded, and expected to verify them by her own experience; she said, 'Give me the hearts of children and of the poor, and I will be satisfied.' The earnestness of this desire was the best aid to its accomplishment.

What was Gwen's delight, when returning, she found Dora Biddulph with her mother: 'Mrs. Owen and I know each other quite well now, Gwen,' said Dora, with one of her sweet smiles. 'I have little time left, and you need lose none of it in introductions. Tell me something about yourself, and then about Geraldine.'

Of Geraldine, Gwen could not communicate much, for she had never written to her since she left Lascelles; what causes there were for this silence, were hidden from Gwen's eyes.

'I heard of her the other day, at Brighton,' said Dora. 'A friend of mine spoke of her beauty, and said she looked 'very interesting, poor thing.' That seemed a strange way of describing such a triumphant-looking creature, and I expressed my surprise. The answer was that she appeared very unhappy and ill. What can this mean?'

'I cannot tell,' replied Gwen. 'I did not know that they were at Brighton till this morning.'

After Dora was gone, Gwen thought often of GERAL-

dine, ill and unhappy. She did not venture to write as if in consequence of this report, either to Catherine or to her cousin, yet to the latter she despatched a short cordial letter, inviting, not exacting, a reply, and none came. About a week later, Gwen had a note from Dora:

‘Come to me in the course of the morning, if you can. I want to talk to you on a subject on which I do not like to write. It concerns Geraldine.’

Gwen complied with this request as early as possible, and on reaching Mr. Biddulph’s house, was taken at once up to Dora’s room. Dora received her with agitation, and cried: ‘Oh, Gwen! you have not heard any report,—but I am afraid it is all true. I cannot help crying; it seems so dreadful.’ And she burst into tears.

‘Good heavens! What has happened? Poor Mrs. Faulkner! Is her child ill?—dead?’

Gwen’s tone of alarm and horror recalled Dora to herself:

‘No, not that; but, Gwen, I really believe she has left her!’

‘Left her? left her mother? how?’

‘Why, last night at a party, we heard some one speaking of Lady Rivers—Mr. Faulkner’s sister, is she not?—pitying her, because she is so rigid, and has daughters of her own; and they said how shocking it must be for her for Miss Eustace to have run away from her house, and with a foreigner, too—a person quite beneath her!’

Gwen turned as pale as death:

‘This can’t be; this is not true. And he is not beneath her or any one. He is of high birth and rank. He is everything that —’ She stopped short.

‘Ah! it must be true,’ said Dora, ‘and you seem to know who it is.’

‘I know whom they mean, but I will not believe it. She did care for her mother, and her mother idolized her. She was very much afraid of Mr. Faulkner, I

think. Catherine—it never could have happened, and Catherine there. If there be any truth in it, it must have been Lady Rivers' fault.'

'How could that be?'

'Why, she always wanted to rule over Geraldine in a way she was not likely to endure. But I must go home. I must try to get at the facts. I will write to Catherine.'

The two girls parted, with their hearts full of real concern for the unhappy Geraldine.

'Surely,' thought Dora, 'there was a nobleness of character in Geraldine which must have revolted from a lie, acted or spoken. Concealment, caution, she always detested. Yet if this be true, and Gwen betrayed the possibility of the fact, while she recoiled from accepting it, of how much falsehood she must have been guilty! Poor girl! if she have thus greatly erred, I am quite sure an hour will come when the mist of passion, be it pride or love, which has urged her on, will disperse, and she will feel the bitterest remorse for every dereliction from the right path. I am certain this is in her. May some true friend be near in that hour of terrible revulsion; some ministering spirit to guard and guide her! Henceforward will I pray, I who have a lot so blest, where love and duty go hand in hand, for this wanderer.'

Gwen hastened home, and approached her mother, all her woe, all her consternation written on her face: 'Oh! mother!'

'You know then what has happened?' said Mrs. Owen, with surprise, raising herself, and holding out a scarcely legible paper—

'Dear Mary—only answer—can Gwen tell me anything of my child? Has she heard of her, seen her since Tuesday? or Ippolito? Your wretched D. F.'

'Dora heard it last night, at a party.' And Gwen, casting herself on her mother's neck, gave vent to the emotions which she had been struggling with; pressed to that tender bosom, she now experienced the relief

she needed. Mrs. Owen presently whispered in her gentle voice, ever soothing to hear: 'I sent an answer. I said that you have known nothing of Geraldine, but that he passed you a week since in London.'

'Ah! I see now,' replied Gwen, 'I understand why he was there—why he avoided me.'

The solicitude of Mrs. Owen and Gwen as to the fate of Geraldine, was for some time unrelieved; for those who were bound more closely to her, and were yet more solicitous, had few thoughts to spare, and little intelligence to convey; but Catherine, convinced by Gwen's late conduct that she must share in their anxiety, communicated the tidings, unsatisfactory as they were, which at length were obtained. Gwen had learned to hold Ippolito in light esteem before these last events, and now pitied Geraldine for having placed her whole happiness in the possession of a heart which she no longer envied her; nor could she but believe more strongly than before that Geraldine was incapable of appreciating Hugh. Ere long her thoughts and interest were called away to a subject which contrasted painfully with that which had engrossed them;—Dora's marriage with Lord St. Ruth. 'I am far too insignificant to be placed in any prominent position, Dora,' Gwen, with unfeigned reluctance, replied to her friend's solicitations to her to be her bridesmaid. 'Let me remain unthought of by any but you. I like to be near you, to see you, to pray for you; but let my presence be unobserved by the throng around, as it will be, if you do not make it remarkable.'

Gwen was indeed sick at heart. It did not tend to cheer her (although she and her mother acknowledged it as a matter of thankfulness), that Lord St. Ruth had obtained for Hugh an appointment to a chaplaincy in India, in a station which must necessarily call upon him to labour also as a missionary. Hugh willingly closed with this offer, which at once made him independent of all but his own exertions, and provided him

with occupation worthy of the strenuous application of every faculty of heart and mind. At the prospect his energy revived. In the morning of life the brightness of the day had faded; but in the cool temperance of a sunless noon, Hugh prepared to labour with diligence.





CHAPTER XLIV.

The need I have of thee thine own goodness hath made ; better not to have had thee, than thus to want thee.—SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. FAULKNER bore her removal to Lascelles better at first than any around her had anticipated ; but this temporary improvement was followed by a relapse, which called her medical adviser to her side, and put to flight the indignation which lingered in Catherine's breast. True, that faithful servant had never breathed a word of blame to any human ear, but in her own chamber she had asked herself : ' Can I be of use here any more ? My mistress has Collinson ; might I not rather go in search of that poor child, who probably has not one true friend near her ?'

It filled Catherine's heart with anguish and dismay to picture the future dangers and temptations likely to beset Geraldine's young life, and to consider how ill prepared she was to encounter them. But Mrs. Faulkner's sufferings pleaded for Catherine's services, and she was too clear-sighted to witness them without serious apprehensions of their consequences.

One day on returning to her mistress's side, after a lengthened visit from the physician, the first glance at her countenance convinced Catherine that his words had been of no ordinary import.

' Come near me,' said Mrs. Faulkner, as she entered ; ' come near me. I have seen how angry you have been ; but what I have to tell will soften you, I am sure. Is the door fast ? It will kill me if I am inter-

rupted.' A cold dew stood on her forehead as she spoke. 'Catherine, what I am now going to say must never pass your lips without my permission: understand that; will you promise? If you will, you may be invaluable to me as a friend. If you will not, I can lock my secret in my own dying breast.' And she turned away.

'My dear mistress,' exclaimed Catherine, 'I will take your confidence on your own terms, and serve you as I may.'

'Thanks. I mean not immediate danger when I speak of dying,' said Mrs. Faulkner, with a ghastly smile. 'We are all dying; but how!' she added, shuddering. 'Doubts and fears have harassed me long. I have never revealed them but to Collinson; she was most about me; now I have told all to Dr.—, and he could not conceal that his opinion corroborated my most terrible suspicions. I have implored him not as yet to inflict this new misery on my husband. He has suffered enough, and attributes, I know not how truly, his sufferings to me. But, Catherine, can you forsake me? Answer, do you not rather promise to abide with me to the last?'

'That were presumptuous,' said Catherine; 'for we know not who will be last.'

'You evade me,' replied Mrs. Faulkner, mournfully. It was true, though there was no evasion in Catherine's words, that her mind was partly dwelling on her half-formed intention of following Geraldine. But she looked on the wan face before her, and thought: '*She* cannot need me more than this poor creature, ill trained for suffering and death.' And she promised to strive to be to her what God would permit her to be. Her mistress recognised the largeness of the promise, and was satisfied.

Mrs. Faulkner, on rallying from this attack, expressed unwillingness to remain at Lascelles. She craved another home, and thought none so desirable as London. Mr. Faulkner offered no opposition to the wish, but

procured her a handsome house in a fashionable square, and gave her permission to furnish it entirely in accordance with her own taste. She entered into this occupation with an eagerness which perfectly amazed Catherine, both with regard to her state of mind, and physical strength; she had imagined her mistress too sick at heart and in body to be so engaged. But Mrs. Faulkner seized on everything that drove away gnawing thought, deadened her to gnawing pains. The loss of Geraldine caused a dreadful blank in her time as well as an aching sense of bereavement: she could not recall her, therefore she tried to fill up in some measure her child's vacant place; her very sensibility caused her to throw herself on trifles, for she could not endure to love another instead of Geraldine—to accept any one in the direct character of a substitute. With Gwen Owen, for instance, she shrank from personal communication. She called as rarely as she could on Mrs. Owen without appearing unkind, and always timed her visits so as to be sure that Gwen would be absent. She was kind and generous to them in every way that did not lead to personal intercourse; but for Gwen to come to her would bring Geraldine too vividly before her eyes, and, on the contrary, to see Gwen beside her mother, attending her with reverence and love, as fondly as Mrs. Faulkner's most romantic yearnings for affection could have exacted,—this was too painful to be willingly encountered; moreover the sight awakened pangs of self-reproach which Mrs. Faulkner recoiled from, and confessed to none. To furnish her new house seemed to her therefore just such an occupation as she could enter on; to order her carriage every morning after breakfast, and hurry from shop to shop,—to look at a great number of every article required, to have a hundred pieces of damask and of chintz unrolled around her, and countless papers suspended on the walls,—all this diverted her from herself; she felt that it did, and pursued the course with an eagerness which, to superficial observers, appeared a part of the frivolity which

had marked her character throughout life. Some ridiculed, others censured; Lady Rivers wondered at Diane's levity, and forced her brother to observe it. Catherine sighed, but waited in patience, and trusted with that charity which 'hopeth all things,' that something worthier would yet be found beneath the surface.

At last the task was completed; Mrs. Faulkner looked round, and could see nothing wanting. Every piece of furniture had arrived which was to arrive. The beautiful mirrors were fixed in the drawing-rooms; Mrs. Faulkner seated in the centre, had pronounced on their effect, and decided on their various heights and positions. All was done, all were gone, except herself and Catherine; and she burst into tears.

Catherine approached her mistress anxiously, and stood in silent, respectful sympathy at her side. Mrs. Faulkner raised her hand in much agitation, and pointing from one mirror to the other, murmured:

'There, there, Catherine, see one repetition after another of my own wretched self, and her beautiful form, her lovely face, never, never to be reflected here.'

Agony shook her feeble frame till it threatened to destroy it. Catherine soothed her as she best could, but Mrs. Faulkner craved the relief of words, and would not be silenced:

'What,' she said, 'what is all this to me but a gilded coffin? What remains but that Lady Rivers should now come to take possession, and what can I now find to do?'

'Much, much,' cried Catherine, earnestly; 'far worthier of an immortal soul.'

Mrs. Faulkner stopped, as if appalled; for a moment she was silent, then she said:

'Oh! Catherine, you must not make me more melancholy than I am. I must strive against that; I must keep up my spirits.'

She moved uneasily away. Catherine desisted; desisted from vain importunity, but turned to prayer. Familiar were to her the words, 'On others what more

easily, and yet what more fruitfully bestowed than our prayers? If we give counsel, they are the simpler only that need it; if alms, the poorer only are relieved; but by prayer we do good to all. And whereas every other duty beside is but to show itself as time and opportunity require, for this all times are convenient; when we are not able to do any other thing for men's behoof, when through maliciousness or unkindness they vouchsafe not to accept any other good at our hands, prayer is that which we always have in our power to bestow, and they never in theirs to refuse.' *

And Catherine prayed on for her mistress, and for Geraldine.

* *Hooker's 5th Book.*





CHAPTER XLV.

— All things now a voice have found,
And speak as if they hastened on to die.

The Baptistery.

THE suggestions which Catherine strove to make being silenced, Collinson proffered others more acceptable. 'It would be a thousand pities to shut up such a mansion ; so beautiful, so sumptuous, such taste displayed in it ; all the world ought to see it.'

Accordingly when spring came, the wealthy merchant's house was thrown open, and the entertainments given in it were worthy of its splendour. Lady Rivers and Jemima were there. They also were of opinion that all this magnificence was made to be seen, and they enjoyed it as the concourse of guests seemed to do. There was a remark whispered here and there, that the hostess looked haggard and unhappy. Some spoke of the wandering star whose brightness had never shone on the London hemisphere, and said it was a pity not to recal her, for Lady Rivers and her dull plain daughter were very unequal to the position which they were invited to fill ; an agreeable foreign Count and his lovely Countess would be just the people to make the whole thing go off well, which now it certainly failed to do.

Mrs. Faulkner felt more than ever wretched ; but it was not that she recognised the worthlessness of so gaudy an existence. On the contrary, she said :

'All this would be delightful if *she* were here ! How gay, how brilliant would she be ! Whose beauty could compare with hers ? In her presence, I could hush my

own pangs, that they might not disturb her enjoyment. But now I keep my groans under with no such motive as would extract half their bitterness, but solely because I can't bear that these gay, happy people should discover my misery and my humiliation.'

Mrs. Faulkner looked around on smiling faces, and chose to believe that all were what they appeared to be except herself.

But Mrs. Faulkner's physician ere long declared that the course of dissipation in which she had engaged must be brought to an end. Catherine urged her to obey, and she did not dare do otherwise; next she implored her to speak more plainly with Mr. Faulkner, but she would not hear of this second proposition, saying, 'Not yet, not yet.'

'Still not yet!' repeated the patient Catherine.

'Will my child never write to me again, do you think?' asked Mrs. Faulkner, one morning, with despair.

'Suppose that you were to write to her,' returned Catherine. 'It need not be a long letter nor a fatiguing one.'

'You know that I wrote last.'

'Yes, but in a way which left her little to reply. I always thought it improbable that she would resume the correspondence until invited to do so by you.'

After a few more difficulties faintly pleaded, Mrs. Faulkner acquiesced. The letter was written, and ready to be sent. Catherine solicited permission to add a few words to it; Mrs. Faulkner was jealous of the request, and did not like to refuse nor to grant it.

'What would you say, Catherine? You remember your promise.'

'I am not likely to forget it,' answered Catherine, mournfully, for she felt it a heavy burden.

Mrs. Faulkner saw that the words had a deep meaning, but avoided the consideration of them. Catherine wrote a few lines, and giving back the letter, said :

‘Pray read this, ma’am ; it would make me more comfortable.’

‘Catherine, I am ashamed !’ replied Mrs. Faulkner with something of that bewitching show of self-condemnation and affectionate trustfulness which used to be one of her greatest charms.

This letter, as Catherine designed, reopened the correspondence between the mother and her child. Geraldine, her solicitations to see her mother denied, had not known how to address her afresh ; but this icy chain broken, she poured forth a full tide of exulting happiness, which seemed to have no impediment but the thought of a parent’s sufferings.

‘There,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, as she finished reading her answer, ‘you see that poor dear Geraldine was not so ill judged, after all, as we deemed her. She knew how to make herself happy. We did not appreciate her husband. Mr. Faulkner’s prejudices made him unjust.’

She could not even refrain from letting these comments reach Lady Rivers’s ear, who, with a very unsatisfactory smile, asked in reply :

‘How long has Geraldine been married ?’

‘More than a year now, I declare,’ returned Mrs. Faulkner. And she added afterwards to Catherine, ‘However miserable one may be, time flies faster than one thinks.’

‘It does indeed,’ replied Catherine, pointing to a minute-glass on her mistress’s table. ‘See how the sand runs through ; those are mere minutes, it is true, but our past days—nay, our past years, seem no more when they are gone.’

‘Very true,’ said Mrs. Faulkner ; ‘that is just what one has heard all one’s life, you know, Catherine. I wonder how many minutes there are to run now—one—two—three—four—’ She counted at first in a languid tone of trifling ; then raising herself, with increasing interest, and fixing her eyes intently on the glass, ‘Suppose, Catherine, these should be my remaining years of life !’ she exclaimed.

'That supposition is merely fanciful, ma'am,' replied Catherine; 'but oh! my dearest mistress'—she clasped her hands, and her eyes filled with tears—'if you would but wake to the reality!'

Mrs. Faulkner was silent for awhile; she looked with affectionate pity on Catherine:

'I shall,' she said; 'Catherine, I shall! But what a waking!' And she turned her face to the wall and wept.

Geraldine's brilliant show of happiness lessened her mother's desire to be near her. 'I should not like to turn all, or any of her joy into sorrow,' she thought; 'I would not be the cloud between her and her Sun. Do you remember, Catherine,' she said, 'how at first I threw all the blame on my poor child? Now I am inclined to take the whole of it on myself!'

'But by neither was the whole at any time deserved,' replied Catherine, kindly.

'Surely, surely, by far the greater guilt lies on me. Young, ill-trained, ill-guarded was my daughter. In what solitary point did I discharge a mother's duty? You are silent; even you cannot exonerate me.'

'In none, adequately, I allow,' replied Catherine to the interrogation, with reluctance.

'Where was I wrong?—most wrong, I mean. Tell me; make it plain to me.'

'The very beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline,' said Catherine, reverentially.

'Ah! that is how Mary Owen would begin. Where is that passage, Catherine?'

Catherine found it for her; it was in the sixth chapter of the book of Wisdom.

'But, my dear mistress,' she said, 'I am not, I cannot be sufficient for your instructor.'

'You are my best, my only friend.'

'I wish you would call fitter counsel to your aid.'

'What do you mean?'

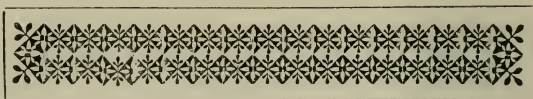
'I mean that of a minister of the Word of God,' replied Catherine, gravely and distinctly.

Mrs. Faulkner stopped short :

‘Ah! you keep ever before my eyes that I am a dying woman,’ she exclaimed, bitterly.

Catherine threw her arms round her. ‘Are we not all dying? Why will we be ever shifting our ground, so as to keep some earthly object between us and that one great truth?—and how small a thing will do it! See, ma’am,’ (and she raised Mrs. Faulkner’s hand, and placed it between her eyes and the window opposite to her sofa), ‘see, ma’am, your hand will shut out all your distant prospect at once. And so the veriest trifles of earth will shut out heaven.’





CHAPTER XLVI.

A gold that glitters, but which is not gold—
A rain that waters, but which fosters not ;
Unfaithful rainbows shining to deceive—
Phantoms of beauty—beckoning forms of love
Holding unreal converse, as in dreams.
When the heart turns to God, the visions fly.

The Baptistry.

WINTER set in ; Mrs. Faulkner desired this year to treble all her subscriptions for the relief of the poor. One day Catherine went so far as to speak of her earnest desire that her mistress could have exerted herself in a personal distribution of her alms.

Mrs. Faulkner recoiled : ‘How can you think of such a thing ? Scenes of misery, bad air—you could be barbarous enough to expose me to such things ?’

‘No, ma’am,’ replied Catherine, in a melancholy tone ; ‘indeed I was not supposing all this practicable now, for you ; but might I not go for you ? Then you would hear something of those whom you relieve, and it would interest and engage your thoughts.’

‘Well—yes—that might be done, if you have time ; but you always find time, I know. I think, Catherine, I will see Mr. Evelyn before you proceed.’

This was Mrs. Faulkner’s first assent to Catherine’s former proposition. Mr. Evelyn was the clergyman of the parish in which Mrs. Faulkner resided, and he called on her at her request. He knew her name and

had remarked the liberality of her donations ; her face was not unfamiliar to him, for he had been struck by an expression of deeper misery than sickness alone causes, which it often wore when she came within the House of God.

‘Catherine,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, with glistening eyes, when Mr. Evelyn left her, ‘that is a good man. I have found a friend.’

Catherine shed tears of joy.

Catherine lost no time in carrying out her scheme with judgment and energy ; her whole heart was in it. Never was there a more zealous and affectionate servant of the poor than she who had with so much faithfulness served the rich ; her service, be it rendered where it might, had, in truth, but one object. Nor was she doomed to be disappointed in the good which she had promised herself should result to her mistress. As Mrs. Faulkner listened to the details which she brought back from the chambers of want and of sickness, her heart forgot for awhile her own woes to feel for others, and she began to understand more than she had ever done hitherto, that ‘the poor,’ ‘the sick,’ ‘the hungry,’ ‘the naked,’ whom she had regarded as classes to whom alms were to be dispensed, meant individual fellow-creatures, each with a heart which felt, a brain which thought, in accordance with circumstances altogether peculiar to one being among countless masses ; that each had his own burden, each his own craving for sympathy, each his own characteristics to be learned and considered, ere either sympathy or aid could be acceptably rendered.

‘I could come to know these people apart, and to care for them as you do, Catherine, I really believe,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, sadly. ‘Or, at least, I ought rather to say, I could have learned all this.’

‘Oh, how easily !’ exclaimed Catherine, kissing her mistress’s pale hand tenderly. ‘It is but to see things with your own eyes,—if hearing move you, what would sight do ?’

‘Too late now—all too late!’

Although all that Catherine undertook had its measure of success, yet there still existed one great obstacle to her progress, and, she believed, to the welfare of her mistress, both in body and mind, and she resolved to attempt to remove it, invidious as the work might appear. This evil was the continued attendance of Collinson on Mrs. Faulkner; and the chief hindrance in the way of her dismissal was the sort of confidence to which she had been admitted on the subject of her mistress’s malady. Against this it seemed impossible to prevail as long as Mrs. Faulkner persisted in keeping it secret from her husband. But after Mrs. Faulkner had acknowledged to Mr. Evelyn that she had good reason to believe that her life could not be prolonged beyond a certain term, and he had naturally made observations which led to the further declaration that her husband was still in ignorance of this fact, Mr. Evelyn seriously counselled her to relinquish a plan of concealment inevitably productive of various ill consequences; one he pointed out which affected Mrs. Faulkner forcibly.

‘You are placing yourself,’ he said, ‘between your husband and the dispensation of Providence, and incurring the responsibility of cutting off a portion of that discipline which would otherwise reach him, and which may be fraught with salutary effects undiscernible to human eyes. You are also lowering the whole tone of the intercourse between you, now limited to so short a period that surely you would little like to trifle any of it away. He will find it difficult to forgive you for so doing, when the truth of which you are already possessed breaks on him at last.’

This second argument availed with Mrs. Faulkner less than the first, which appeared to her to be more really applicable to the case. She had learnt to regard her husband’s character with awe and fear; she knew there was worth in it; but she dreaded a hardening of the heart which all his sister’s influence went

to petrify. And whose fault was it that Lady Rivers possessed so undue a share of power over him? Surely her own. And with this acknowledgment, she further told herself that it was her duty to try the counter effect of a revelation of her own state of danger. Much as this resolution cost her, she did resolve; and it was perhaps the first great victory over self that Diane had ever gained,—for little as she yet realized the fact, hers had been a selfish life.

No one knew, nor could she herself define, the exquisite pain it was to lay aside the veil hitherto drawn round her sufferings, and to reveal them to Mr. Faulkner, and through him to his sister.

At the first shock her husband's assumed, habitual sternness gave way; he was prostrated by grief. But Lady Rivers persisted in disbelief, and succeeded in instilling it into him, until he required fresh medical opinions to convince him of the reality and the extent of the malady. All this was unspeakably torturing to his wife, but she bore it with a sweetness and a gentleness which touched every heart.

One inevitable consequence of Mrs. Faulkner's incapacity for exertion, and lowness of spirits, was that Mr. Faulkner fell back more and more on his sister, passing many of his leisure hours with her, and preferring to discuss his affairs with her, rather than to trouble his wife with them. To Lady Rivers's great delight, and to Mr. Faulkner's silent satisfaction, the unattractive Jemima made a conquest of the heart of an Irish Viscount, and poor Diane had much to endure in hearing all the details of the approaching marriage. She could not perceive, (and perhaps it was impossible that this should not afford her some consolation), that Lady Rivers manifested all the prudence which might reasonably have been exacted from her, nor help discovering that the glitter of a coronet dazzled her not a little. The point on which she displayed most skill and wisdom, was in obtaining a munificent portion for her daughter from Mr. Faulkner, and in

not placing any dangerous degree of confidence in her very delightful son-in-law. Mrs. Faulkner daily heard Jemima's virtues as a daughter extolled, and witnessed demonstrations of fondness which her mother had never bestowed on her before. Sometimes she could not refrain from betraying signs of impatience, and Catherine felt no small indignation at the utter want of generosity and delicacy which could permit Lady Rivers thus to gall one so deeply afflicted. Mrs. Faulkner made no comment, offered no expostulation, but when she felt that inward suffering would betray itself in restless fretfulness, she shrank into solitude, and invited none but Catherine to break it.

Lady Rivers, her son absent in India with his regiment, her daughter married, established herself in her brother's house, and Mrs. Faulkner resigned every hope of freedom from her *surveillance*. Henceforward it became the object of Lady Rivers's life to secure to herself the enjoyment, and to her children the inheritance, of her brother's wealth. If in former years the spirit of monopoly, the greediness of gain, which took possession of her, had been predicted, she, as surely as the ambitious Hazael of old, would have demanded: 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' True, that the current of her thoughts had never been clear as truth, nor sparkling as generosity; never watered in its course the fair flowers of love and kindness; never refreshed and invigorated the roots of friendship's tree; but Lady Rivers for awhile suspected not what its ravages would prove when the tide should be swollen to overflowing by the increasing floods of self-interest, rapacity, and ambition. As time swept every obstacle from her path, save the dying, childless woman, who hung still like a solitary autumn leaf on the bough, she knew not how to pursue her purpose too closely, or to guard against its defeat too rigidly. When first she applauded her brother's just indignation which led to the sentence of banishment against Geraldine, she confessed not to herself

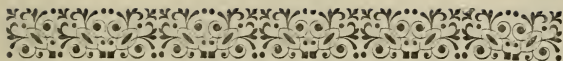
that the latent cause of her lending him her support, and discouraging every consideration that might soften and lead to retractation, was the fear of recalling a rival, and reinstating a counter interest.

Mr. Faulkner, regarding Diane with pity and with love, desired that she might have every possible alleviation of her sufferings; and even while he refused to acquiesce in the recal of her daughter, was influenced by a tender consideration for her. He had availed himself of an opportunity of enquiring about the Baldovini, and from what he heard, concluded that were he to bring Geraldine and her husband near Mrs. Faulkner's dying pillow, he might only open the way to harassing anxieties. He did not, however, oppose her enquiries as to whether change of climate might not prove beneficial, or at least not injurious to her; but a journey to Italy was at once pronounced impracticable by her medical advisers to Mr. Faulkner himself, and by slower degrees Mrs. Faulkner was made acquainted with their veto. Catherine could not but perceive that Geraldine's letters did not show that immoderate disappointment and vexation which she might naturally have expressed. Mrs. Faulkner shut her eyes to the constraint rather than coldness that marked them, and set on foot a plan of getting at least as far as Paris in the autumn, having been forbidden all hope of passing the winter in Florence. Geraldine embraced this scheme with far more cordiality, and it was often spoken of between the mother and daughter as an event of not improbable accomplishment.

But there seem to be mysteries in all maladies which elude the most watchful physician, and leave the sufferer also in ignorance of the appointed time of release. An unlooked-for change accelerated Mrs. Faulkner's dissolution, and brought it too close to leave any but the faintest shadow of hope of bringing her child to her side while yet she lived. Lady Rivers took it on herself to communicate this alarming alteration to Mr.

Faulkner, and also to transmit it in writing to the offending, but long since forgiven daughter. By what motive impelled we will not decide,—whether consternation and the hurry of the moment threw her off her guard, and banished all consideration for the feelings of others, leaving her to act in uncontrolled accordance with the asperity of her character, and her love of passing judgment,—she certainly permitted herself to write a letter which could not fail to rive the heart of Geraldine when read. She spoke of Mrs. Faulkner's failing health from the hour that Geraldine left her, and of her own conviction that the violent revulsion of feeling, and the alarm then experienced, had confirmed the malady, and given it its deadly character. She concluded with exhortations to repentance and never-ending contrition, and with promises of kindness and attention such as had been unfailing for years on the part of the writer, for the few remaining weeks or days of a wretched existence ; nor were self-congratulatory ejaculations on the excellence of her own Jemima excluded. This letter Lady Rivers was barbarous enough to despatch ; it was unscanned by any other eye, and if a fit of compunction surprised her when the deed was irrevocable, she hastily stifled it. Lady Rivers could never blame herself nor endure to hear others blame her, without experiencing a degree of pain which she thought proved the sensitiveness of her conscience.





CHAPTER XLVII.

Many long weary days I have outworn,
And many nights that slowly seemed to move
Their sad protract from evening until morn.

SPENSER.

‘CATHERINE, you see that this is dying,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, suddenly, in a more audible voice than she had spoken in for hours. Catherine, sitting in her mistress’s darkened room, and believing her to be taking repose, followed the course of her own prayerful thoughts in almost breathless silence. She rose immediately on hearing her voice, and came to the bedside.

‘Kneel down, and listen to me,’ said Mrs. Faulkner. Catherine obeyed.

‘Oh! my child, Geraldine, my child,’ exclaimed Mrs. Faulkner, wildly tossing her arms.

‘Calm yourself, ma’am, I intreat you.’

‘I cannot. Bear with me. I will, as soon as I can, be quiet.’

Catherine took one of Mrs. Faulkner’s hands in her own, and held it tenderly.

‘Catherine, I told Lady Rivers that I was dying; she did not contradict me. I told her my child must be written to; she answered that she had already done so! Oh! horror,—oh! misery! I don’t doubt that she has addressed my child so as to pierce her to the heart. I said ‘I trust you have not put anything to hurt, to reproach her.’ She made no reply. I implored to know

exactly what she had written ; she evaded me, and left me,—and then, Catherine, what then ?

‘She sent me hither. She looked alarmed, and I found you in a state of exhaustion which I could not account for. Since then, I trusted that you were sleeping.’

‘Ay, a dull stupor ; but it has restored me, thank God ! Now you must write for me, by this day’s post ; I will trust no one else—none but you—and you I can trust.’

Catherine turned away in silence, and fetched the writing materials, quickly, noiselessly ; she was ready.

‘Now begin:—‘Your dying mother implores your forgiveness for all the thoughtless, senseless wrongs which she inflicted. She trained you not to be the child of God, nor her dutiful child ; she goes to account for the trust she has betrayed, for the noble character she has marred ; but she goes with a broken and a contrite heart, and that, God hath said, He will not despise.’ ‘Catherine,’ said Mrs. Faulkner, breaking off, ‘there is hope in my end !’

Catherine was weeping too profusely to reply.

‘Nevertheless, I believe that when I see Mary a bright and beautiful angel, I shall still be tortured by anxiety for Geraldine,—that will be my punishment !’

‘I hope, I trust, you will be where God will wipe every tear from off every face !’

‘But my child, I cannot believe that there will be peace for me until there be safety for her.’

‘The sleep that is in Jesus cannot be racked by troubling dreams.’

‘Dreams ! no, but realities such as these will not let me sleep ; this is what I *feel* ; argument is useless. But, Catherine, you could do much to strengthen hope ; will you ?’

‘How ?’

‘I shall release you soon. One work of mercy more, Catherine, for me and mine. No doubt Geraldine will

start to come to me, if possible; but if anything prevent her arrival, go to her. I feel that we shall meet no more, but you—seek her out—plead with her; not with Lady Rivers' upbraidings, but as I would plead at her feet, could I crawl to them, that she will consider why we live, and whose we are, and redeem, while yet she may, the time which I taugth her so miserably to misspend.'

The unhappy woman had raised herself nearly upright in her bed, while she uttered these words with increasing energy; when she came to a pause, she sank back on her pillow, the cold dew hanging on her brow. Catherine bent over her, and wiped it away. As soon as she at all rallied, she said in an eager, hollow tone:

'Are you going?'

Catherine started: 'Where? when? to despatch this letter?'

'To Florence, as soon as I am dead?'

'Yes,' said Catherine, promptly.

Mrs. Faulkner wrung her hand: 'I am satisfied. There, finish the letter. It must go.'

Catherine paused thoughtfully a few moments. At length she said, with as much composure as she could command:

'Before I knew how ill you were, and that you could not spare me, I thought of going straight to her; I had a feeling that she would not send me back.'

'And I have kept you from her!'

'Oh! ma'am, don't regret that. It will be the greatest comfort in the world to her that I was with you, and could write her words of pardon from your own mouth.'

'No, no; no words of pardon—entreaties for pardon.'

'But, ma'am, that is not just; indeed she will not, cannot feel it so. You must add your pardon, too.'

'Well then, I will, and oh! that I may meet forgiveness as full—as free!' Mrs. Faulkner raised her dying eyes to heaven.

‘Now, Catherine, put what else you like. God grant that this letter may obliterate the other, if my poor child be condemned to read *hers* first.’

Catherine briefly added to Mrs. Faulkner’s words those truths which she thought would be most salutary to Geraldine at such a period, and her selection was not of such as would for ever break the bruised reed.

‘There will be nothing to impede your going, Catherine; I can trust Mr. Faulkner there. We owe you a vast debt of gratitude, and he among the rest; for I know he has wished to have his poor, silly Diane taken care of,—though he has let that torturing sister be ever beside her.’

‘Don’t, ma’am, pray don’t talk thus. It kills me, and it is a waste of your own precious breath. Let me see you quiet before I go out.’

‘Well, I won’t speak another such word. God bless you, Catherine. I am much happier now that letter is written, and you have promised.’

When Mrs. Faulkner had time to rally from the great excitement of this communication with her child, there was yet one other point to which she turned her thoughts.

‘You must bring Gwen to see me once more,’ she said to Catherine, after a period of silent meditation. ‘I want not only to offer some reparation for past wrongs, but to avoid the infliction of pain by the apparent unkindness of banishing her wholly from my death-bed. Poor little thing! I appreciate her better, and love her more than I ever did before. I understand the worth of her solid qualities; I can more readily believe in the existence of deep feelings under a cold exterior. Certainly, she had not an agreeable surface, unfortunately,’ she added, with a sigh.

‘Do you know why I sigh, Catherine? Because but for that I think that Geraldine might have loved her, and have found a valuable friend in her.’

‘Well, ma’am, it was not very likely that Miss Owen could unfold her feelings to Miss Geraldine, for she was

always doing something which made her shrink back; and then, too, the way she trifled with Mr. Hugh wounded his sister deeply.'

'Ah! yes, and I never heeded it. You do go to see her, Catherine, oftener than you tell me, I know; and I am glad of it.'

'Certainly I do, ma'am; and I really believe that you would think that she has improved very much. Her mother has a softening influence, for everything good seems to expand in her atmosphere—everything evil to be scattered and dispelled like 'morning clouds.' Altogether, Miss Gwen's present way of life suits her; plenty of occupation for mind and heart. And what energy she shows! It is surprising what she does. She finds a great deal more time to bestow on the poor than is spared to them by half the idlers in this great metropolis. This has come to my knowledge more than once. It is only another example of the old saying, 'where there's a will, there's a way,' and there never was the will wanting, as you know, ma'am. She had always heart enough for the poor. It was a pleasant thing to see how much more gentle and humble, and even gay and cheering she became the moment she was with the lowly, and ignorant, and child-like. I don't see her tried now as she used to be. I don't say that I do; but I can't help fancying that she would bear it better.' Catherine spoke warmly, as she ever did when she spoke in praise.

'Poor child!' said Mrs. Faulkner; and then with a smile sweet as her smiles of old, she added, 'then really, Catherine, I hope we are all growing better.' She felt a satisfaction in having resolved to see Gwen, which gave her peace.

And Gwen—it was with the deepest feelings of joy and thankfulness that she heard and obeyed this summons. A heavy cloud seemed to roll itself from her horizon, and leave her to enjoy the serenity of a sunset full of promise for the morrow. But sensations of pain mingled with those of pleasure when she looked on

Mrs. Faulkner's altered form, and saw what sickness and sorrow had been doing. Still there was an expression on Diane's face far more beautiful and delightful than any Gwen could recal in her brightest moments, and she sat silently holding her hand, and yearning to tell that her heart was full, nigh to overflowing, of love.

'Gwen, my child,' said Mrs. Faulkner, softly, 'I understand all the past better now, thanks to God's chastening rod. Your trials, my own deficiencies, all are plainer. I want your forgiveness, and I believe I shall have it—nay, let me speak—let me say what I have thought of, and called you here to hear—you can't bear to be asked to forgive—to listen to self-condemnation—no generous nature can. I know that. But let it be, dear Gwen; bear it this once; repentance, death-bed repentance is too solemn to be trifled with. I must get at the *truth*.'

'Yes,' said Gwen, half suffocated with emotion; 'yes, truth—but all, not in part—and is there not truth in your past generosity, in your present noble avowal of error?' She raised Mrs. Faulkner's hand earnestly to her lips.

'Oh! my dear, kind benefactress, I too have thought of the past, and have found room enough for repentance in it. Oh! that I could recal it! Oh! that I may ever have it in my power to offer reparation.'

'How?' inquired Mrs. Faulkner, with surprise and interest.

'By proving a true friend to her who now fills our thoughts.'

Mrs. Faulkner uttered one fervent ejaculation:

'God grant that this may be!'

Her pale lips bestowed a long, earnest kiss on those of Gwen.

When she spoke again, it was in a hollow voice, which warned Gwen that the interview must not be prolonged.

'You will tell your mother what has passed between

us, and how sincerely I regret my faulty discharge of the trust she placed in me. Tell her, too, that her saintly example is the frequent subject of my meditations, and deep is the consolation I derive from the knowledge that I have her prayers.'

Thus they parted.





CHAPTER XLVIII.

Remembrances, like ghosts, that walk
In the mind's stillness, holding talk
Of her, and of her winning ways.

WORDSWORTH.

ONE of the last services that Mrs. Faulkner asked from Mr. Evelyn, was to intreat her husband to grant her the satisfaction before she died of hearing that he forgave Geraldine.

‘Poor child! I may well ask him to forgive; he was justly incensed with her!’

Mr. Faulkner met Mr. Evelyn’s approaches with a frigid reserve.

‘Mrs. Faulkner’s daughter,’ he said, ‘had voluntarily renounced the position in which he had placed her as his daughter also; he certainly was not bound to reinstate her in it by any law human or divine, nor did he believe that she would accept of such a reinstatement. He had reason to think that the Countess Baldovini and her husband considered themselves ill treated by him; nevertheless he could not ask their pardon, as he did not concur in their opinion. The less said about the past, the better; it could not be recalled, and the subject must be dangerously agitating to Mrs. Faulkner.’ Mr. Evelyn felt it impossible to penetrate further, and advised Mrs. Faulkner to desist, and direct her thoughts to other points equally important. Mr. Faulkner was no less averse to hear the language of

self-accusation from Diane's lips, than that of intercession for her child.

'I have been a wife not worthy of you ; my folly has embittered your life.'

'Diane, I cannot bear to listen to this ; I verily believe I have been as much or more to blame than you. I allowed responsibilities to rest on you beyond your strength ; I yielded where for your happiness I ought to have been firm, even if you miscalled me harsh ; I ought to have been your guide and counsellor more than I was, or if unable to fill the post myself, to have given you the advantage of one qualified to assist you.'

Mrs. Faulkner shrank away. 'He means that he ought long ago to have placed his sister in the position she now occupies ; that would never have done. It is quite true, Augustus,' she replied, sadly, 'that you were too indulgent, and I ever abusing your indulgence.'

Over the last solemn and sacred scenes of the dying chamber we let the veil fall. Geraldine never reached it ; she knelt not in Holy Communion at her mother's side—never uttered the prayer of repentance—never heard the words of absolution there. At midnight Mr. Faulkner and Catherine stood side by side by the pale corpse.

'Her last word was 'Geraldine,'' whispered Catherine ; 'and look—how like Mary she lies there !'

Mr. Faulkner started ; a thought flashed through his mind of a promise made by Mary's dying bed concerning the offending Geraldine. He motioned Catherine to leave him, for he would be alone with his grief beside the cold remains of her who in life by her loveliness and her many fascinating qualities, by the terrible afflictions which had overtaken her in spirit and in flesh, had touched all the tenderness and all the pity in his nature.

When first Mr. Faulkner knew Diane, the sweetness of her disposition and its natural liveliness strug-

gling through distress, her extreme beauty and desolate situation, won his love and excited his compassion ; and to the last there were hours of softness in which she rose before his eyes, again arrayed in all her loveliness, her children clinging round her, and when the many days of his existence to which her fascinations had lent sunshine recurred to his memory. Then, if alone, the stern man would bow down his head on his hands, and let the vision float before him till it melted him into tears. Nor did bitterness of spirit ever create in him an abiding wish that he had never seen, never known his Diane. At times Mr. Faulkner had been almost led to believe her possessed of more sentimentality than depth of feeling, so skilfully did she contrive for awhile to veil the remorse which tortured her. She had a proud reluctance to acknowledge how utterly her plan of education had failed with Geraldine. Long after she knelt before Heaven in self-abasement, and poured forth self-reproaches on the friendly bosom of Catherine, she shrank from confession to her husband or his sister ; and this aversion was not solely that of pride, but of a conviction that, if she were wrong, neither were they right. Revulsion of feeling made her not a convert to their views ; and true it was that while they haughtily passed their verdict of weakness of intellect on poor Diane, who never had learnt the lesson which Bacon's sagacity inculcates, to 'take heed not to show yourself dismantled and exposed to scorn and injury by too much dulceness and facility of nature, but show some sparkles of liberty, spirit, and edge'—they were not qualified to discern what her deficiencies were, nor to supply them. Soft and irresolute as Diane appeared, she was determined only in her opposition to every species of hardness and self-denial for herself or those she loved. 'A soldier and a servant,' she recoiled from every unwelcome reminder that a vow was upon her to discharge offices so severe.

But it was not this unfaithfulness to her post which

struck Mr. Faulkner; he thought of her as one solemnly bound to the performance of arduous duties even less than she did. He indeed recognised for himself a warfare and a toil, but they were with 'this thwarting outer world,' not with the world within. He prided himself on the energy with which he engaged in the struggle, and exulted in the soldier's victory and the servant's wages, for both were his. Ofttimes wearied and wounded by the slavery and the conflict, he sought repose in his own home, and there he found himself sometimes vexed and harassed, sometimes soothed and pleased. When he met with any annoyance, Lady Rivers was so prompt in detecting it, could reason so well on its cause, and would so fearlessly undertake to supply the remedy, that he learned to place in her the confidence which the bold empiric successfully challenges in the outset, and disgracefully forfeits in the end. That end was not yet arrived. It was indispensable that there should be a great alteration in Mr. Faulkner himself before he could recognise how fatally he had been mistaken in his sister's character, and learn that the wisdom of the world is as despicable as its folly.

If Mr. Faulkner's feelings towards Geraldine softened beside her mother's corpse, they soon hardened again under the influence of Lady Rivers's asseverations that it was her undutifulness which had killed poor Diane. Without strictly examining into the probability of a charge which thrilled him with horror, he allowed it to strengthen his desire to banish for ever from his mind a subject of exquisite painfulness. But conscience forbade him to seek to purchase peace at such a price, until he should at least have learned her mother's last thoughts and wishes concerning Geraldine. Without doubt she must have confided these to Catherine, yet he preferred to have recourse to his sister in order to discover them. Her answer was :

'Why you know there was a vague fancy to the last

that her child would arrive. I did not think so myself.'

'Strange that not even a letter should have been received yet.'

'So it is. I believe that some plan was formed for Catherine to go to Madame Baldovini as soon as all reasonable expectation of her arrival should be at an end, which, indeed, it now is.'

Mr. Faulkner changed the subject abruptly, by saying :

'I wish you to express without delay to Catherine my sense of her most valuable services in my family, and acquaint her with the nature of the provision I desire to make for her. This paper will explain my intention to settle an annuity on her for life. You will understand how to spare her feelings ; you know this is not payment. It is regard—concern for her comfort—her health has been tried—she wants rest.'

'This hurried journey which she talks of will preclude that. She fancies that she cannot go too soon, and of course I can't interfere. She knows what passed,' said Lady Rivers.

'She does,' replied Mr. Faulkner, quickly. 'She must judge ;' he spoke with evident pain. Lady Rivers, secretly of Catherine's opinion, however different might be her motives, was about to seek her in haste, but Mr. Faulkner detained her for a moment. 'Of course,' he said, 'whatever she needs for present use—for such a purpose—she has but to name.'

Poor Catherine could very ill bear Lady Rivers's address. She listened in silence, and did not even look at the paper which she held in her hand, in which Lady Rivers expected her to display so much satisfaction. At last she said :

'I am a young woman still ; I can earn my own livelihood quite well. Mr. Faulkner is always too generous, my lady. I hope,' she added, with an uncontrollable burst of emotion, 'that my master means

to speak with me before I go. I know he can't bear thanks nor leave-takings, but of course I must see him.'

'I really fear, Catherine, that he is not equal to it; it did not seem to be his intention. We must spare him. You see that you are quite upset yourself.'

'I should not be so with him, I trust,' replied Catherine, resuming her self-command, and she proceeded to declare her intention of departing for Italy with no more delay than would permit her first to visit her parents at Brighton for a few days.

In the privacy of her own chamber she was able to consider the nature of Mr. Faulkner's gift; and though she honestly felt that to attain it had never been the motive of her exertions, yet she was conscious that it was no undue acknowledgment of them, and her heart warmed with the pleasurable idea of ministering to the comforts of her aged parents in a higher degree than she had yet been able to do. Mr. Faulkner, in presenting her with a handsome annuity, followed out his opinion that no other mode of provision was so little likely to have its intention thwarted. Catherine set out for home with the noble intention of transferring to her parents the greater portion of what was given to herself. The two old people, overjoyed at the return of their daughter, heard with considerable dismay of her further project. She strove to allay their fears by telling them that she was going in company with an English family, who had agreed to make her part of their *suite* till they should reach Florence, while her story touched their hearts so tenderly that they lost all wish to check her endeavour to bring back one whom they looked on as a lamb strayed from its mother and its fold.

'All my desire is,' said Catherine, earnestly, 'that Mr. Faulkner will give me some comfortable message to take to this poor thing; but I don't expect it. I don't expect any good now that Lady Rivers is to live with him.'

Mrs. Irving, on the contrary, could not but hope where Catherine only feared. That one so young, and so unhappy as Geraldine would now doubtless be, should be refused comfort that any fellow-creature could bestow, was incredible to the kind, simple-hearted old woman.





CHAPTER XLIX.

She speaks things in doubt,
That carry but half sense ; her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts.

SHAKESPEARE.

CATHERINE returned on the day she had fixed. Still were there no news of the young Countess. Agnes came to her in deep distress, having learned that she was about to quit them. 'All go, one after another, and none come back,' she said, in a tone full of woe.

Catherine had always striven to keep alive in her mind the memory of Geraldine ; her name never was omitted in the poor girl's daily prayers ; at other times she showed a lively remembrance, or occasionally a total oblivion concerning the past. She now threw her arms round Catherine's neck :

'The servants told me that you were gone, or that if you returned it would be but for a day. Don't go, pray don't go.'

Catherine embraced her tenderly, feeling at the moment that she was clasping to her heart the only creature under Mr. Faulkner's roof who retained any affection for the wanderer she was about to seek.

'But, Agnes,' she said, 'if you knew where I am going, I don't think you would ask me not to go.'

'Should I not ? Is it anywhere that I should like to go, too ?'

'No, that would not be possible, Agnes,' she con-

tinued, drawing the girl towards her, and looking earnestly in her anxious, perplexed face ; ' I am going to find Geraldine.'

' Are you ?' cried Agnes, eagerly ; but instantly changing to the utmost despondency, ' you will never find her—never.' She shook her head.

' I hope I shall.'

' Ah ! no, never. She is not like other people, now—a sort of spirit—a sort of ghost.'

' Why, what is a ghost ?' asked Catherine. ' Now some mischievous, foolish maid-servant has been putting fancies into her poor head to torment her.'

' Why, you see it, and can't touch it ; you look for it, and can't find it.'

' And Geraldine—is she like that ?' asked Catherine, much touched by what she thought was the poor girl's way of describing that Geraldine's form was often flitting before her mind's eye.

' Yes ; for I thought I had found her a few days ago. I saw her perfectly—not like what she was when she went away. But Mrs. Faulkner, when you took me to her bedside, was not like what she was when she used to let me sit by her sofa ; still I knew her very well ; I went to look for her, and I have never seen her since.'

' What do you mean ?' asked Catherine, quickly. ' Why did you not call me, or some one else to look for her, too ?'

' I am sure I can't tell,' said Agnes, quite confused. ' Oh ! now I remember—there was no one to call—no one knew of it but me.'

' Where was it, then, Agnes ?'

' Why, down at Lascelles, to be sure. Don't you know that mamma sent me there on Wednesday morning ? Clarkson went to get things ready for us to go there on Saturday and stay over Sunday. We only came back yesterday. Don't you understand it all now ?'

‘No, Agnes ; can’t you tell me something more ?’

‘Clarkson was busy, not thinking about me, and I got into the garden, and I looked everywhere, I am sure that I did. I did not venture to call very loud at first—no one answered me—no one came. It was Geraldine, but she never came again.’

‘But how could you think that she was in the garden ?’

‘Oh ! the little gate to the church was open, and I was just going through it, when Clarkson caught hold of me, and led me back. I did not say a word to her.’

‘Nor to any one else ?’

‘No, not one word.’

‘Are you quite sure ?’

‘Quite.’

Catherine went away, and found an opportunity of asking Clarkson if Miss Agnes had frightened her by her wandering at Lascelles. Clarkson, a servant not used to have the charge of Agnes, perhaps fancied that this question was meant to be the foundation of a reproof to her for losing sight of Miss Rivers. Her sole reply, therefore, was a flat denial of her having wandered at all.

‘What ! not into the garden ?’

‘She never went out of the house,’ was the unflinching answer.

Catherine tried to make Agnes resume the subject, but without much success ; she was very incoherent the second time, and then a third related with wonderful distinctness how she had seen Geraldine’s face appear at the window. The only conclusion that Catherine could come to was, that the girl’s solitary visit to Lascelles had recalled Geraldine to her memory with the vividness of reality. She had known Agnes at times repeat her dreams with full confidence that they had really happened.

Mr. Faulkner had signified his intention to comply with Catherine’s wish to see him, but did not show

any signs of fulfilling his promise until the carriage stood at the door on Saturday to convey him to Lascelles. Catherine was to embark on Sunday night. Mr. Faulkner had commissioned Scott, his confidential clerk, to make every arrangement for her comfort. Catherine received a summons to the library.

‘Come in, Catherine, come in. I never meant to let you go without seeing you, my good friend. I believe you will find that Scott has done everything very well. I hope he will have saved you all trouble, and he shall take you on board. God bless you, Catherine.’ He wrung her hand.

‘No, no ; not one word more—thanks from you ?—no, I can’t bear that.’

Again Catherine tried to speak ; again he stopped her, this time almost sternly.

‘Don’t allude to the past—this must not be.’

‘Nor to the future, sir ?’ asked Catherine, eagerly, holding fast his hand.

‘Still less,’ replied Mr. Faulkner, turning decidedly away ; after a moment’s pause, he added : ‘*You* have always a friend in me. When you need my services they are yours ; but no more of these allusions. Mind, Catherine, I have a right to require obedience in this.’

He walked into the hall with a determined step. ‘Jemima !’ he called.

Lady Rivers was already in the carriage, having taken the sole step she could to shorten the interview. Agnes was leaning forward, wistfully, to catch one more glimpse of Catherine, who remained standing just where Mr. Faulkner left her, her heart very full, almost to breaking.

Mr. Faulkner drew up the window sharply, and cleared his throat ; he did not turn one look more towards the house. Agnes asked of her mother as they drove through the square : ‘Shall we ever see Catherine again ?’

Lady Rivers knew not what answer to give ; she hoped that the question did not reach Mr. Faulkner's ear. Agnes was sensitively alive to causing displeasure, and shrank back into her corner, remaining silent, throughout the drive, except that she repeated, more than once, to herself : ' I shall seek again.'

These muttered words catching his ear several times, caused Mr. Faulkner disturbance, and at last he said, rather impatiently :

' Seek what, Agnes ?'

But Agnes felt perfectly certain that she had better not tell, and appeared quite unconscious of the question.

Catherine took her departure from London according to her expectation.





PART III.

All the mischiefs you can suppose to happen to a furious, inconsiderate person, running after the wildfires of the night, over rivers, and rocks, and precipices, without sun, or star, or angel, or man to guide him,—all that, and ten thousand times worse, may you suppose to be the certain lot of him who gives himself up to the conduct of a passionate blind heart.

Jeremy Taylor's Sermons.





CHAPTER I.

Why do I longer live in Life's despite,
And do not die then in despite of Death?

SPENSER.

ON a wet gloomy evening in October, 182-, a young woman was carried into the —— Hospital, having been knocked down in a crowded part of Oxford-street, by a coach, insensible, and apparently seriously injured. The promptest attention was bestowed on her. ‘But the worst of it is,’ said the surgeons, ‘she is evidently in a high state of fever.’ At first it seemed probable that death would terminate her sufferings speedily; she survived, however, in spite of the severity of her injuries, to go through the torturing phrenzies of brain fever.

She was quite young; her dress was black silk; every thing about her betokened a person of a superior class, and probably a foreigner, for there was in her pocket a book in Italian; but nothing could be found that afforded the slightest clue to her residence in London. At times she spoke with the utmost volubility in a strange tongue; in English very rarely, and so incoherently, that the nurse, to whom, of course, she became an object of lively interest, gathered as little information from the one language as the other. She sometimes addressed the nurse as one who had known her, and loved her from a child. She sometimes spoke of a mother. The wedding ring on her pale thin finger, one day fell from it; this caused a paroxysm of grief, but all expression of it was in her foreign tongue. There was standing in the ward an Irish priest, come to minister to one of his flock. He

had travelled to Rome ; he recognised the Italian accents of the poor raver, and paused to listen. The nurse seized the opportunity to allay her curiosity in some degree. The priest, however, looked horror-stricken by what he heard, and to her inquiries would yield no answer. 'Sacred as the secrets of the confessional is what escapes from the lips of this poor sufferer,' he said, and shook his head. The nurse was forced to respect the reply, and only inquired further : 'Does she say anything that gives any clue to friends in London or England ?'

'Nothing whatever,' returned the priest. 'She speaks but of the dead ;' 'the murdered,' he might have added, but he did not, and he requested to be summoned, if she gave signs of returning reason.

The poor creature had luxuriant golden hair, in long, crisp, curling tresses of remarkable beauty. The nurse was bid to sever them from her head. As they fell on the ground, she gathered them up, and rolling them in a mass, laid them aside with the clothes belonging to the stranger.

One day the nurse seated herself by the bed of 'the foreigner,' as she was called in the ward. It was at a quiet, unoccupied hour, and she watched with tender interest her slumbering patient. The fever was abated, and she slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion.

'I expect she will awake in her right mind, if she do awake,' thought the nurse, and a tear twinkled in her eye. This good nurse Byrom was beloved throughout the ward for her extreme kindness of heart and gentleness of hand. She was a fine handsome woman, full of high spirit and courage, thoroughly acquainted with human nature on a bed of sickness, knowing scarcely anything of the world beyond her own ward ; that was her world, and a varied one it was. She was indefatigably active ; when she did sit down, she was apt to fall to musing, but eye, ear were watchful, when her thoughts seemed wandering far away. A slight start now called her back to the present ; as

her patient made a feeble attempt to turn, she smoothed her pillow without rousing her from sleep, and then went down the ward to attend here and there to other sufferers. When she came back, the poor 'foreigner' lay with her eyes open ; they were full of amazement, but the wildness of delirium was gone. She tried to speak. The nurse bent over her.

'Dove sono ? Perchè quì ?'

The nurse shook her head.

'I can't understand you, poor thing,' she said, sorrowfully.

'English !' exclaimed the sick woman. 'Where am I ?—In what country ?'

'In England—in London—in ——— Hospital,' replied the nurse, gently.

'How can this be ?' murmured the sufferer.

'You were knocked down—you were very much hurt—you are still lame,' continued the nurse ; 'time and patience are needed.'

Thus addressed, memory seemed to awake with one keen pang ; the sense, too, of her bodily ailments first came to her. The poor stranger clasped her hands with a sudden effort, and, as if overcome with anguish, fainted. Still, from this shock she revived, though she lay for hours in too feeble a state to speak or to be spoken to. Retaining her senses, she asked the nurse, the following day :

'Have I nothing here belonging to me ?'

The nurse replied :

'I have the clothes you wore, and a book. There was a priest here one day when you were talking, and he said you must be a foreigner and a Roman Catholic—'

'I am neither.'

'He thought you would like to see him if you had your reason again.'

The stranger made no answer to this, but soon after said :

'I want that book—and then I want my letter—'

my Bible—surely, surely, I had my letter with me—and my Bible, I can tell you exactly where I put it—on a little shelf against the wall, opposite the window. The woman saw it—’

‘But where : in what room ?’

‘The back room—looking out on chimneys—a dark dismal room !’

‘A bed-room ?’

‘Yes : and a gloomy stuff bed.’

‘And what is the name of the street ?’

The nurse had been trying by degrees to bring her to this ; but she looked bewildered, and could give no answer. She was fatigued, perplexed. At last she said :

‘Then I am not to have Mary’s Bible ?’ in a tone of intense regret, and the tears rolled down her pale cheeks. The nurse knew not how to comfort her better than by fetching her book, and, as she approached the bed, turned over the leaves of it with her finger, not heeding what she was doing. A letter fell from them. The stranger made an effort as if to dart towards it, but sank back powerless on her pillow. The nurse picked it up, and gave it her. She snatched it eagerly, yet shuddered as she touched it ; the book she took more calmly. The nurse had looked within it, and had discovered a small engraving of a coronet pasted on the fly-leaf, and the name Umiliana written above. She pointed this out, saying :

‘This is yours ?’

‘Yes ; but that is not my name,’ replied the stranger, in a voice that spoke her resolution not to make any further communication. The nurse observed that, with all the secrecy she could contrive, she read the letter from time to time, and that it cost her many tears ; so many that she heartily wished it had never been found.

‘I wonder that it never fell out of the book before,’ she said.

But the stranger understood it very well from the mo-

ment that she saw it fall. It was written on paper no thicker than silver-paper, and had been so steeped with her tears and so blistered, that she had folded it and placed it between the leaves to preserve it from perishing, and the remaining moisture had glued it there, as it were, until the book had been shaken rather quickly. She offered no reply, but concealed her letter carefully, fearing that it might be taken from her. But the nurse did not meditate such a measure. She went quietly away, placing a Bible in her reach, and took an occasion to say to her :

‘Then, you don’t want to see the priest?’

‘No.’

‘The chaplain?’

‘Not yet.’

When next the surgeon was with the patient, she fixed her eyes earnestly upon him, and said, in a hollow voice :

‘Do you think that I am dying fast?’

‘No ; by God’s blessing I trust that you are beginning to mend slowly.’ There was somewhat in the tone of the interrogation which forbade him to use the common language of congratulation ; he saw that such an attempt to cheer would wound like the bitterest jest. As it was she repeated convulsively :

‘God’s blessing !—say rather His curse. It is He who denies me death. I must not blame you—but don’t expect my thanks.’

‘My poor friend,’ returned the surgeon, kindly, ‘now that you are able to speak, tell me a little about yourself before you came here. What took you out at the time you fell?’

‘Ah ! that I remember perfectly ; it was to get my mourning—’

‘What mourning did you need?’

‘That was what confused me, and I felt that I must go myself—that I could make no one understand ; I wanted weeds, I suppose—’

‘Where did you come from?’

‘I cannot tell,’ she said, with a burst of grief. ‘I cannot tell—and oh! I have lost things which I value so much!—and I cannot make the nurse understand—’ She went over all the story of Mary’s Bible again, and found an attentive listener.

‘Now, don’t fret yourself; it only makes you worse. Be patient, and you will recollect another day.’

‘Shall I?’ she cried eagerly; then hid her face, and murmured: ‘Oh! if I might forget!’

The surgeon tried to draw more from her.

‘You did talk in your fever, but we could not gather anything of use to you. You spoke chiefly in Italian.’

‘I am just come from Italy. When first I found myself here, I thought it was an Italian hospital. I wondered to see no nuns, and to hear English.’

‘How long is it since you came to England?’

‘I don’t know how time has passed.’ She drew out her letter suddenly, forgetful of precaution, and pointing to the date, said:

‘I left Leghorn two days before that was written.’

It was dated the 15th of September. She observed that the surgeon looked at the letter with interest.

‘You can’t understand it,’ she said, quickly, and refolding it, she placed it under her pillow, and leant back on it, saying, with decision:

‘No one can understand anything about me.’

‘I shall ask the chaplain to come and see you, by-and-bye,’ observed the surgeon, with friendliness.

‘Not yet, not yet,’ was her faint answer.

‘You will hear Mr. Herbert read the prayers in the ward, presently,’ said the nurse, in a soothing voice; ‘I am sure you will like him when you have seen him, and are a little used to him. There is a dear, good soul, too, who visits my ward. She has been away a long time. I am expecting to see her back every day. She won’t be long in London without coming here, I know. I am sure you will like her. Mr. Herbert

knows, and likes her : she will do you good. Every one loves her ; so would you, after a bit.'

'Does she come to see the patients?'

'Yes ; just any poor sick thing who is glad to hear her speak like a sister—'

'I never had a sister,' said the stranger, groaning.

'Well, then, she will show you that you have as good as found one.'





CHAPTER II.

My bread shall be the anguish of my mind,
My drink the teares which from mine eye do rain,
My bed the ground that hardest I may find ;
So will I wilfully increase my pain.

SPENSER.

WAYWARD and miserable as the stranger seemed to be, she could not repel the truly Christian benevolence of Mr. Herbert's approach ; it melted her heart, and inclined her to speak to him with some freedom ; not of her outward circumstances—of her inward condition.

‘I know,’ she said, ‘that I ought to submit patiently to whatsoever God awards me, and that no punishment is more than I deserve ; but it is very dreadful to be told that I am likely to live on !—’

‘Are you, then, ready to die?’ asked Mr. Herbert, gravely.

She hesitated.

‘I do repent,’ she said, ‘and I can’t amend. God has so afflicted me that it seems as if it were in a just wrath, not in mercy. He has left no scope for amendment. I must ‘cease to do evil’ ; I cannot ‘learn to do well.’ If any of those whom I have injured were left for me to serve—but they are gone, and I am disabled from service—if any who have injured me were left for me to forgive—but all is at an end. I was a rebellious child, now I am an orphan—I was a resentful wife, now I am a widow. All that is allotted to me is to lie here with ‘my sin ever before me !’

‘Is there not,’ replied Mr. Herbert, gently, but seriously, ‘somewhat of that presumption which hurries into sin in your impatience for death? Shall you pronounce how long or how short a time it is necessary for you to lie here, suffering in flesh and spirit, with your ‘sin ever before you?’ If the time for action be past, that for contemplation is come. You are in the hands of the great Physician; my poor child, lie still!’

The sick woman remained in silent thought for awhile, evidently on subjects of the most painful nature; then speaking with difficulty, she said:

‘There were words in the first Scripture lesson I heard you read which I shall never forget.’

‘Will you repeat them?’ asked Mr. Herbert.

‘‘Thou shalt eat up thy leaves, and lose thy fruit, and leave thyself as a dry tree.’ That am I. There is the history of my life, told in two short lines.’

‘But the tree is not dead,’ remarked Mr. Herbert, in a low, composed voice.

The stranger looked down on herself with a short scornful laugh, more painful to hear than sobs and groans.

‘Withered it may be, but not dead,’ continued Mr. Herbert, resolutely. ‘If a consuming blight have bereaved it, as you say, of both leaves and fruit, the wholesome frosts of winter’s adversity can correct that evil, and its spring may put forth leaves again and bear fruit; not the leaves, blossoms, or fruit of an earthly paradise, but such as are borne of the tree which is planted by the river of life, ‘that will bring forth his fruit in due season, his leaf also shall not wither.’’

This following out of the parable which had struck her imagination so forcibly, fixed the attention of the suffering woman more than any different mode of address could have done.

‘There were other parts of that chapter,’ she said, ‘which seemed meant on purpose for me. I lay and listened like one condemned.’

‘Let us turn to it,’ said Mr. Herbert, kindly, ‘and

see if it do not contain some whisper of hope, some salutary counsel as well as rebuke.' He put his finger on a verse which caught his eye the moment that he found the chapter, and read : 'Give ear, my daughter, receive my advice, and refuse not my counsel.'

'Ah!' she interrupted, 'it is in the words before, about wisdom, that my condemnation lies : 'She is very unpleasant to the unlearned. He that is without understanding will not remain with her. She will lie upon him as a mighty stone of trial, and he will cast her from him ere it be long.'"

'These forcible expressions you are using as contrite acknowledgments of what you have done,' said Mr. Herbert. 'The more clearly you recognise the folly and error of the past, the better are you prepared to listen to admonitions for the future. If, hitherto, you have rebelled against wisdom, now 'Come unto her with thy whole heart, and keep her ways with all thy power. Put thy feet into her fetters, and thy neck into her chain. Bow down thy shoulder, and bear her, and be not grieved with her bonds.' And here is the promise which shall not fail : 'for at the last thou shalt find her rest, and that shall be turned to thy joy.' The light of hope shall increase more and more to the perfect day, when in realms of quenchless brightness 'thou shalt put her on as a robe of honour, and shalt put her about thee as a crown of joy.'

'Yes—bitter as is your present affliction, deep as is your abasement, there lies this prospect before you to refresh your languid eye. Say not you have no future. Satan would gladly shut it out from your view by raising the noisome mists of despair betwixt it and you, so that groping in darkness at noonday, you might fail to find the path which leads back to the home you once abandoned.'

Henceforth the stranger welcomed Mr. Herbert's visits. She showed gradually less impatience for death, but there were hours of depression and of suffering in

which she believed it near at hand, and in one of them she said :

‘Mr. Herbert, if I die, I should like a tablet to be placed on my grave, which would thrill the heart of every passer-by, and speak a warning not easily forgotten. I should wish you to have a few words inscribed on it to signify that I did not honour my father and my mother, and that my days were not long in the land.’

She raised her pale hands to her face, and the tears trickled through the long, thin fingers.

‘I do not think that your span of years has yet reached its close,’ replied Mr. Herbert.

After Mr. Herbert left her, the poor sufferer took out her little book ; it was an Italian *Thomas à Kempis*. She tried to read a few pages, but found that attempt far too fatiguing, and she got her good friend the nurse to fasten the book open against the pillow, so that she could look at it. The words she came to were :

‘*Figliuolo, Io son il Signore che consola nel tempo della tribolazione, e tu vieni a Me quando non ti senti aver bene.*’

She did not desire to go further.

The stranger was lying between sleeping and waking one noonday, when she was startled by an exclamation made by the woman who lay beside her :

‘There she is, I declare !’

The tone was one of extreme pleasure. She opened her eyes, for such accents were not common where she now was, and cast them languidly in the direction in which the other woman was looking. What she there saw excited in her violent emotion, and of a different character from that expressed by the first observer. She raised herself as nearly upright in her bed as she was able, gazing intently, with a look of mingled astonishment and horror, on an object which one would have thought the last in the world to arouse such

sensations. There stood at the entrance, at the further end of the long ward, a young woman, diminutive in size, simple in attire, her countenance singularly expressive of thought and feeling, overspread with that pallor which is sometimes their accompaniment. Not an eye rested on her now which had seen her before, but brightened to welcome her. That of the stranger seemed held by some irresistible fascination, while her convulsed countenance spoke the utmost pain and desire to escape. The spell was broken by a movement on the part of the visitor; the stranger sank down on her bed suddenly, perfectly silent, and drew the clothes over her head, remaining motionless beneath them. Thus she lay for some minutes, which to her seemed immeasurably long. Presently she heard the nurse's voice, and partially and fearfully withdrawing the sheet which covered her face, she beckoned her, and made her lean down to hear her hoarse whisper—

‘I saw some one enter whom I never saw here before. I won't have any one come near me, nor speak to me—it would kill me; mind, Mr. Herbert is quite enough. I will tell the surgeon if you dare—’

‘Why, what is all this?’ cried the nurse, offended and surprised. ‘Who is coming near you? Oh! Miss Owen, I see; there are enough here glad to see her if you are not; there is no sort of necessity for all this.’

‘Forgive me,’ replied the pale, trembling creature; ‘I am so weak—the least thing almost drives me out of my senses—but promise that no one shall approach me.’

‘Certainly not, against your wish. I will see to it—there, I promise you.’

The stranger, concealed from view, lay in almost breathless apprehension while the visitor made her gradual progress up the ward, drawing nearer and nearer to her bed. With increasing and almost uncontrollable agitation she made a gesture to catch the

attention of the nurse who had kept near her, and with intense, agonized supplication she put her finger on her lip imploring silence, and the keeping of her promise. The nurse thought that the time to put it into execution was now come, and approaching the visitor, she laid her hand on her arm, and said:

‘Don’t go to that bed, please. She can’t bear it.’

‘Is she dying?’

‘No, I hope not—a poor crippled thing; but she is young, she will live.’

The person addressed gave a sign of acquiescence, and kneeling down by one of the adjacent beds, read prayers for the sick in a low distinct voice, which reached, though not intended to do so, the ear of the stranger. The rise and fall of her shoulder betrayed her convulsive sobs. Suddenly a deadly faintness overcame her, she tossed back the covering wildly with her arms, and uttered a deep groan. There was a cry that she was expiring. Gwen Owen rose, and sprang to her side before the nurse could reach it. A sensation of undefined horror and interest ran through her veins as she hung over the sufferer, scanning her beautiful features, colourless as marble. The nurse anxiously motioned her away, but she would not withdraw. The fainting woman was reviving. Her first words were those of indignation, addressed to the nurse:

‘I told you so—I said it would kill me. Is she gone?’

‘You must, you shall,’ said the nurse, with authority; but Gwen, at all other times obedient to her, would not now be restrained.

‘No,’ she said, ‘no, I cannot, will not go. Let me stay by you, dearest Geraldine; let me stay by you as a sister.’

Geraldine gazed wildly on her.

‘Then you know me?’ she asked, sternly.

‘How could any one not know *you*?’

‘Ha! I should have thought that I might pass un-

recognised now! Are these beautiful features never to be forgotten?' and Geraldine broke into a wild, hysteric laugh. The nurse would have removed Gwen, but on the contrary, Geraldine held her now with a trembling grasp, and when she could speak again, pulled her towards her, and whispered in her ear with as much emphasis as the exhaustion fast stealing over her would allow her to employ—

'If you bring any one here, you will murder me. Promise me not to tell of my existence to any being living—go, forget, but do not betray me.'

Gwen replied, with all the earnestness of a solemn vow :

'I will bring none to you but by your own choice. But if I forget you, may God forget me!'

There was a gleam of grateful astonishment in Geraldine's eyes, but she could speak no more. Gwen gave her one kiss on the forehead, and followed the nurse, who was impatient to be obeyed. That kiss was verily a kiss of peace. A gentle drowsiness stole over Geraldine, and she slept. It was night when she opened her eyes; the lights were dimly burning, and the nurse not far from her side.

'How long have I been sleeping—dreaming?' asked Geraldine. 'Have I been delirious again?'

'No; you have slept the best sleep I have seen you enjoy since you have been here,' replied the nurse, cheerfully. 'You shall take something nourishing, and sleep again, I hope.'

Geraldine felt a strange unearthly sort of tranquillity; she was unwilling to speak or to think; unwilling to dissipate the dream which had brought the semblance of love to her side. The nurse raised her; held a cup to her lips, and she drank; then the nurse laid her on her pillow again.

'Sleep, like a good child,' said the kind woman, for she was struck by a child-like demeanour, different from anything she had seen in the sufferer yet.

‘I will try,’ replied Geraldine; ‘but tell me, did you ever hear of any one called Gwen Owen?’

‘I wish you would not talk, but sleep,’ said the nurse, in a vexed tone. ‘You disturb the others, you do.’

‘Only yes, or no,’ besought Geraldine.

‘Of course I know her. Now be quiet.’

There was no more sleep for Geraldine that night; but she did strive very sweetly, like a child strives, to be good—to obey so much of the nurse’s injunctions as she could, and to be quiet. She was mindful, too, of her fellow-sufferers, and of the assertion that disquietude on her part disturbed them.

‘Shall I be selfish enough—hard-hearted enough to do that?’ she asked herself.

Poor Geraldine! How little had she thought thus to learn the lesson of consideration for others, when she and Gwen first parted.





CHAPTER III.

E virtude era, e più che umano sforzo.

ALFIERI.

‘**C**OMPASSION is momentary love,* it has been said, and certainly the moment of recognition created in Gwen’s bosom such tenderness towards the unhappy Geraldine as destroyed at once for ever every feeling of a contrary nature which had existed in it.

On quitting the ward, Gwen was thankful to enter the nurse’s own chamber, there to gain repose, and to allow the sensations of astonishment and horror roused in her to subside. The nurse soon followed, and kind and considerate as she was, she could not wholly refrain from such exclamations as these :

‘Well, to think !—It is surprising !—this poor thing who perplexed us all—who never seemed to have a friend she could ask for, to find a friend in you !’ She brushed away a tear. ‘It has been too much for you, I see. You will like to be quiet before you go out. You know you can stay here as long as you will ;—I will leave you for a bit—’

‘No, no !’ gasped Gwen ; ‘not unless you are called for. Stay and tell me something about her—how and when she came here.’

The nurse repeated the story we have already told. Gwen, as she listened, gradually bowed down her head, and buried her face on the pillow of the bed beside which she was sitting. Sobs, scarcely audible, shook her frame, and the nurse stopped more than once, till implored by the gesture of Gwen’s hand, or a half-choked word, to proceed.

* Bishop Butler.

‘And this is Geraldine!’ exclaimed Gwen, raising her streaming eyes to heaven.

The nurse’s interest was awakened to the highest degree, but, with delicacy and good feeling, she abstained from asking any question. Gwen read the inquiry of her eyes, though she kept herself from words.

‘All I can tell you is,’ she said, falteringly, ‘that I knew this lady well in former years; she left England the wife of a foreigner of rank, and returns as you see. Further than this, all is mystery to me as well as to you.’

‘Then you don’t think that she has friends in London?’

‘Friends!’ repeated Gwen; then she added:

‘Yes; I am her friend—my mother will be her friend; others, perhaps—she has none now. But I must go.’

‘I am sure you are scarcely fit.’

‘I must be fit,’ replied Gwen; and she descended the flights of stairs with a step less firm than when she had mounted them, but with a composure very distinct from the rigid self-constraint with which, in earlier years, she used to carry out the hard task of keeping her feelings in subjection. Long mental training and bodily habit both told here. Gwen passed with quiet swiftness through the streets which led to her home, entered, and seated herself by her mother. The flicker of the fire reflected itself on her colourless face.

‘My dear child, you look ill.’

‘Do I, mother?’ said Gwen, altering her position a little, so as to retire into the shade.

‘Yes, indeed,’ replied Mrs. Owen, raising herself on the sofa, and placing one hand on Gwen. ‘I wish that you were not going out to-night.’

Gwen started: ‘I had forgotten—but don’t wish that, mother dear, for you know I particularly desired to go this morning.’ Gwen sighed. ‘Mrs. Mowbray

has done so many kind things by us, that I thought I should have enjoyed playing for the children to-night.'

'Well, I hope it won't make you quite ill—'

'Oh! no fear of that—it will do me good.'

'Tell me what you have been doing, Gwen.'

Mrs. Owen had lain down again, and Gwen was sure that she could not see her face.

'I gave three lessons, and then I went into the —— Hospital for an hour—the first time since my return. It was a little trying, but I am glad I went, and nurse Byrom was glad to see me. Let us talk of other things now. How have you passed the day?—reading?—visitors?'

'A few—and I have some letters to show you.'

Mrs. Owen acquiesced in what she guessed Gwen's wishes to be, and the quiet half-hour they spent together was refreshing to each.

In her own room, on her knees, Gwen thanked God with a fervour never equalled in her thanksgiving for any temporal blessing, except, perhaps, on the occasion of her return to her mother, for having sent her to Geraldine's aid. The tears she shed were a relief to her overburthened heart. Earnestly, solemnly, did she implore strength and judgment adequately to discharge the task to which she was called. Her heart yearned to acquaint her mother with the discoveries of the morning, that she might enjoy the advantage of the dictates of her noble mind and delicate and ardent feelings.

'I must intreat Geraldine's permission to speak to her.'

Gwen's room was apart from her mother's, to whom, unable always to regulate her hours, she thought this arrangement secured more unbroken rest. It was very small, and arranged with all Gwen's scrupulous neatness—'the old-maidish neatness' of former days, at which Geraldine had so often laughed. There were the same articles which had been the adornment of her

chamber at Lascelles, with the addition of a few no less precious. As Gwen rose from her knees, the light of her candle fell strongly on a beautiful copy of a *Mater Dolorosa*, by Vandyke, the gift of Lady St. Ruth, and the work of her hand. The original was in the Pitti Palace, in Florence. Thus everything around was more or less associated with Geraldine. At this moment, as she gazed on the majestic countenance—the eyes raised to heaven in full faith and reliance, in spite of the exquisite anguish portrayed on the parted lips, her mind was absorbed in the thought of the consummate woe, unparalleled in the history of this world's creation, which belonged to the mother of the Crucified. The remembrance of that solitary grief, communicable only to God, strengthened Gwen to go forth, bearing her unseen Cross, expected by others to walk as if unburthened, free to perform any task they assigned to her.





CHAPTER IV.

Sweet without sour, and honey without gall.

SPENSER.

AT nine o'clock Gwen kissed her mother tenderly, and set out, in accordance with her promise, to attend a *soirée dansante*, which Mrs. Mowbray gave for the amusement of her children, who were looking forward to it with vast delight.

Gwen was a great favourite with these, as with most other children; they had hung about her on the last morning that she was with them, insisting on it that she should come to their dance.

'We are to have some grown-up people, Miss Owen, as well as children,' cried Archibald, a handsome boy of nine, 'for the sake of cousin Eliza; but all the same, she has promised to dance with me as much as I like, and I shall take care that she keeps her word.'

'But we shall have some games before the dancing,' said little Marion, 'and you must come, Miss Owen; you are so good at games.'

Gwen, pleased with the opportunity of pleasing the Mowbrays, promised to acquiesce with all their proposals.

'Mamma, is not this capital?' exclaimed Archie. 'Miss Owen says that she will come on Thursday evening, and play for us to dance just as long as we please.'

'I know,' replied Mrs. Mowbray, 'that Miss Owen's good nature is almost untiring; but you must take care that you don't exhaust her, if you can't exhaust it.'

When Gwen first found herself in the glare of lights, within the sound of music, and in the sight of people gaily dressed, gaily talking, gaily laughing, a dizziness came over her, and she could scarcely stand, certainly not walk across the room. She felt glad that no one immediately descried her entrance; grateful to the insignificance which shielded her from observation. But Gwen was no longer insignificant when the children discovered her.

‘Why did you not come earlier? We have been wishing for you, and looking for you, and here you are in this corner, after all.’

‘But, my dear Archie, I only just came in time to see you finish your country dance with your cousin Eliza. How proud you looked of your partner.’

‘Well, and had I not a right to be so? She is the best dancer and the prettiest girl in the room. Every one must allow that,’ said Archie.

‘Certainly,’ said Gwen, regarding with pleasure the happy girl of eighteen, whose kindness of heart and sweetness of temper, beaming on her fresh, young, May-like face, made her an universal favourite.

‘And now, Miss Owen,’ said Archie, ‘you must dance with me.’

‘No,’ replied Gwen, ‘I will play for you as much as you please. See, here is my music.’ She showed him the roll in her hand, and took her seat at the piano. Her fingers flew over the notes with amazing celerity. Her only feeling was a wish not to pause.

‘I never heard any one play for dancing like that girl. One can scarcely listen to her and stand still. What a finger! and what capital time!’

‘A little unhealthy-looking creature she is!’

These observations caught Eliza’s ear as she paused for a moment in the *Valse*. She had never heard Gwen complain of ill health; on the contrary, she seemed very strong; but Eliza looked at her now, and was shocked by the pallor of her countenance.

‘I beg your pardon,’ she said hastily to her partner;

'I can't dance any more. You can easily find some one else to dance with, and I must go and play.' And feeling that she had been thoughtless, she darted to the piano.

'Do let me take your place, Miss Owen—I must, indeed. You shall not play any longer. I can't bear to see you look so tired.'

'No, no,' said Gwen; 'go back; don't take any notice of me; I would rather not. Pray go back.'

'Well, then, end soon, and after that I must play.'

Gwen made no answer, as Eliza reluctantly quitted her; then she said to herself:

'I won't break down; I won't faint; this is a happy evening with them. I won't cause them any interruption if I can help it. Kind Eliza!'

Gwen did not break off till she hoped that even the dancers themselves must desire her to do so.

'Now, my dear Miss Owen, I am going to take your place. Please don't distress me by refusal; you can't do anything ill-natured. Here is Archie waiting to take you to have some ice. Just let me see your music. Oh! yes, I know it. I can play it—not like you, of course, but they must be content.'

'I expect universal discontent when you are seated here,' replied Gwen; but Eliza would not listen.

'I can't dance, thank you; I must play a little,' said Eliza, with determination.

'You play! What a bad arrangement! And I could not by any possibility get here before; and you have been dancing with every one else.'

Eliza wished with all her heart that it had not been so; she would willingly have played during all the other dances to have danced this one. But she only shook her head, and replied, 'It can't be helped.'

'Why not? there is Miss Owen. I'll ask her.'

'Oh! pray don't; pray stop. We have tired her to death. Ah! if I had spared her sooner, she might have been rested now. Ask some one else to dance.'

'No; that at least I will not do.'

More than one young lady remarked : 'How very conceited and fine Mr. Meredith is to come and not dance with any one !' But as he had taken a great deal of trouble to come to dance with Eliza, he was not at all in a humour to turn to others. Indeed, he was not at first in a very good humour with her, and positively provoked with that little plain music mistress for being tired ; but as he leant against the window where he could both see and listen to Eliza undisturbed, the extreme sweetness of her face, which never looked prettier than now, the eyes cast down, the long lashes resting on the cheek partially shaded by the fair silken ringlets of her hair, seemed to beguile him of his anger. His eye was suddenly caught by the countenance of Gwen behind her, which appeared over Eliza's shoulder ; he marked the pallor of its hue, the compressed lip, and saw tears start to her eyes, unwelcome tears evidently. A compassionate interest was excited in one whom he had considered before merely as a necessary provision for the amusement of the evening, in the same manner as the pianoforte itself might be ; he began to forgive Eliza for regarding her as a sensitive being.

Gwen took advantage of a pause to lean forward and whisper :

'Miss Gordon, I am quite rested now. If you would but let me play again, it would be a kindness. I cannot tell you how much better I like it than sitting here, doing nothing. Oblige me in my own way.'

Eliza was startled by the earnest entreaty of her tone. She turned her head, and looking at her, said :

'You really wish it ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

They changed places. Mr. Meredith was at Eliza's side.

'Then now you dance with me ?'

Almost his first words were :

'Do you know, Miss Gordon, what I have been observing with great interest while you were playing ?'

Eliza certainly thought that he had appeared to regard her own fair face with a considerable share of such a feeling ; Mr. Meredith amused himself by enjoying her confusion for a moment, and then added what she was not expecting to hear :

‘The countenance of that little player—how much intellect and feeling there are in it!’

‘There are ; she is very clever, and very good. Oh ! I could tell you things about her which must interest every one.’

‘I should expect more than common from her.’

‘I am glad you can see that,’ exclaimed Eliza, looking up with sincere pleasure.

‘And surprised ; I perceive, now, why you always seem to despise any tribute of admiration from me. You think I can see no deeper than the beauty that everybody sees.’

‘It is your delightful playing which has made everything go off so well, Miss Owen,’ said Mrs. Mowbray, as she wished Gwen good night, shaking hands with her heartily. ‘Much too good for the occasion ; that everybody could hear. So very good-natured of you.’

Gwen listened with pleasure, but very thankful she was to say good-night.

‘Thank you, Miss Gordon, for your kind aid,’ she said, as she took leave of Eliza ; and a little to her surprise, Mr. Meredith, whom she had not known till this evening, offered her his arm to go down stairs.

‘Miss Gordon’s playing cannot be likened to yours,’ he said ; ‘but her good-nature may perhaps stand a comparison with that which I have heard so justly appreciated in you.’

‘It is delightful,’ replied Gwen, with an emphasis which startled herself as well as her companion, but which at that moment she could not refrain from, for the contrast between this lovely young creature, and Geraldine in her brightest hours of beauty and her depths of woe, forced itself upon her ; ‘to see one so beautiful, unspoiled by love or flattery, full of consi-

deration for others, of humility for herself. 'May she rejoice long in happiness. She does not seem to need adversity.'

A pause followed these words. Gwen recovered herself, and tried to smile, saying:

'If you did not know that I am a governess, you must perceive it now; but why should I bestow gratuitous lessons?'

'I hope that you always find your scholars listen with as much pleasure as I do,' replied Mr. Meredith, laughing, as he took leave of Gwen with much cordiality.

'I fancy that Mr. Meredith would not dislike those lines I wrote the first time I ever saw Miss Gordon,' thought Gwen, and she repeated them to herself as she drove homewards.

MIRANDA.—A SKETCH.

'To me thou art as that fair maid
Who through the magic island strayed,
Where floated sprites on every breeze,
Whisp'ring soft music through the trees;
Now on the crested wave gay dancing,
Now in the lightning flashes glancing,
Now nestled in the tiny flower
Which deckt the pavement of her bower;
For 'twas their prime delight to move
About Miranda's path of love,
While her stern father walked apart,
And conned in clasped book his art.
Hers the 'fringed curtain' of thine eye,
With glance now playful and now shy,
And hers the sweetness of thy smile,
Which could her father's care beguile,
And hers the young ingenuousness
With which thou dost each thought express,
Or leave them half to us to guess,
When they a secret are to thee
Locked in thy soul's simplicity.

'Twas thus I marked in one brief look
And traced it all in memory's book,
And should we never meet again,
The lovely portrait will remain.
The sketch Imagination draws
At the first glance without a pause,
Is oft more forcible and true
Than ever patient study drew.'

Gwen was too full of feverish excitement to sleep; when towards morning she got a little dreamy slumber, Geraldine, Dora, Eliza passed in strange confusion before her; Ippolito, with his witching accents, was there,—and she was striving to warn Eliza, who would not be warned.





CHAPTER V.

It is a sickness denying thee anything, a death to grant this.

SHAKESPEARE.

THEN came the terrible waking hour, when light flashes on the eye, and memory on the mind—the first sensation that of tossing on a world of waters, the first wish for that haven where we would be!

Gwen, as soon as she could collect her thoughts, sprang up, eager to hasten to the hospital to learn more;—to learn to believe what she already knew. She felt an intense yearning to turn to her mother for counsel, and for relief to her oppressed heart. If possible, she would obtain Geraldine's permission to reveal her secret to one only—and that one so capable of yielding advice and sympathy. Gwen had no thought of breaking through her ordinary avocations, and the maintenance of secrecy was one among other inducements for carrying them on. There were words, too, of the nurse's that recurred more than once to Gwen: 'She seems to have none to look to.' 'None! none but me, perhaps,' Gwen had repeated to herself each time they crossed her mind; and as she hurried on, vague speculation on what Geraldine might need, and what she could do, engaged her.

'Will she come to-day?' asked Geraldine, fixing her hollow eye, glittering with fever, on the nurse.

'Yes, she certainly will, for I see her at the entrance now.'

Geraldine's countenance changed.

'Don't mind; no one will mind you,' said the

nurse, in a tone of reassurance ; but it was no wish for greater privacy which filled Geraldine's thoughts at that moment, for it was to her as if not one human being were present save herself and Gwen. 'Bring her,' she said, impatiently.

It was evident that Gwen did not venture to approach unbidden. Now Gwen was sitting beside her bed, and their hands were locked in each other.

'I can't tell whether this is most shame or joy,' said Geraldine, who had hidden her face for a moment when Gwen drew near, but was now gazing on her with an expression of wonder.

'Let it be most joy,' replied Gwen, in a tone of deep feeling.

'It was terrible to be alone,' said Geraldine, drawing a deep breath. Then she added, 'Catherine ! oh ! Catherine, if I could see her, I could bear that.'

Gwen knew it was impossible but that Catherine should have been more welcome than herself. She replied, soothingly :

'She cannot reach you yet ; she is at a distance, and I am near.'

Geraldine burst into tears. Gwen thought at first that it was at the knowledge of Catherine's absence. Not so.

'Oh ! Gwen,' she exclaimed, 'your face, your voice, all is changed. If it had not been so, I could have let you go yesterday from my bedside. I know that I could ; I had covered my face—you did not detect me. If your tone had been dry and cold, as it used to be, I could have borne it ; but when you read that prayer which said, 'Thou writest bitter things against her,' I must have died if I had not cast off the covering which seemed to choke me, and uttered those cries which brought you near. Oh ! when you had all that pity in your heart, you did not know whom you were pitying.'

'Thank God, thank God, who brought me hither !'

'That is for me to say, not for you.'

‘Oh ! Geraldine, if you could know how I have said it since, in my prayers. I came here as soon as I could, that we might be certain it was no dream, but I can’t stay now.’

‘Can’t you ?’ said Geraldine ; ‘that’s hard ; but nothing ought to be hard to me.’

‘Will you grant me one request ?’ asked Gwen, touched and encouraged by these words. ‘It would be much for my happiness and for yours,’ she ventured to add. ‘Let me speak freely to my mother of all I know ; she is my friend, my counsellor—everything to me, and to you she would be everything also.’

‘Go away, go away ; you want to kill me. You need never come back again unless you choose.’

‘But, Geraldine, I do choose ; I will come back in any way that you will let me,’ said Gwen, kneeling beside her.

‘You promised not to betray me to any human being—then I could bear you ; now you want to begin to speak of things that it will kill me to hear—go—go—’

‘I will,’ said Gwen. ‘Everything shall be as you would have it.’

‘You go to return no more—very well.’

‘No, no, Geraldine ; you can’t think I mean that.’

‘I can think anything when you can speak to me of your mother, knowing I have none.’

‘I do know it and mourn it,’ said Gwen, touching her black dress as she spoke. ‘Is it wrong, is it cruel to wish my mother to be able to befriend the motherless ? She cannot come to you—only pray for you, think for you, tell me what is best to do for you.’

‘No, no, no—I want no advice—nothing done for me. I can lie here and die. I have Mr. Herbert.’

‘I am very glad of that,’ said Gwen.

‘You know him ? Well, you may tell him that you have found me as proud and as passionate as ever—dying as miserably as I have lived.’

So great was Geraldine's agitation that it attracted the attention of the nurse, who interposed and asked Gwen to retire. She immediately obeyed, remarking :

'It is impossible for her to see me without excitement at first.'

'Then, if you please, Miss Owen, don't come into the ward again till I have asked the surgeon's opinion.'

Gwen assented ; but she added :

'Only tell her that you have placed this restriction on me ; nothing could be worse for her than to believe herself forsaken.'

'True,' replied the nurse.

Geraldine listened to the declaration of the surgeon and of her nurse that no one could be allowed to approach her, if it threw her into such agitation.

'As you please,' she said, in a tone of haughty indignation. 'If she come, I shall kill myself, I suppose ; and if you forbid her, you will kill me.'

The nurse was reasonably provoked ; the surgeon looked grave. He tarried for a minute at Geraldine's bedside, and said to her, in a quiet tone of compassion :

'My dear young lady, I am afraid that hitherto you have been so situated as to fancy that pride and self-will became your station. Can you not look round you here, and learn something of patience and submission from the poor ?'

Geraldine turned away, ashamed and contrite. She was very quiet all the rest of the day, shedding silent tears.

The nurse, before she left her at night, said :

'Miss Owen called this evening to know how you were.'

This intimation procured Geraldine a little sleep. Still she could not reconcile herself to the idea of Mrs. Owen learning that she existed in such a place, and in such a condition ; yet her generosity was shocked at the requirement of a sacrifice on Gwen's part rather than on her own. Fortunately, Mr.

Herbert came the next day to see her. He had heard of the recognition from the nurse, but did not allude to it. Geraldine timidly approached the subject :

‘ You know Gwen Owen, sir ?’

‘ I do,’ said Mr. Herbert, and he spoke of the assistance which she had sometimes rendered him. ‘ I should like her to visit you.’

‘ So should I,’ replied Geraldine ; ‘ but she wants to tell her mother about me, and that I cannot bear.’ She now spoke freely to Mr. Herbert, and asked, ‘ What ought I to do ?’

‘ Give Miss Owen the comfort which she needs, of perfect openness with her mother. It is not without much exertion on her part that she will be able to come to you, and why should you add constraint in those hours of home intercourse which she has been accustomed to regard as her refreshment from toil ? Do you know Miss Owen’s position ?’

‘ Not so as to realize it,’ replied Geraldine.

Mr. Herbert spoke of its arduousness, but with caution, for he did not wish to make Geraldine feel that she must not allow Gwen to strain her powers yet more in her behalf ; but he did wish to make her alive to the cruelty of adding unnecessary difficulties to her labours. He said a few words concerning Mrs. Owen ; the just estimation in which her daughter held her.

‘ Could you see Miss Owen for me ?’ asked Geraldine, hesitatingly. ‘ The surgeon says that if I talk of anything agitating I must not see her at all, and I have nothing but what is so to talk about. Tell her I consent, but that I shall consider the promise of secrecy which she gave me as equally binding on her mother. It is only believing them *one* that makes it possible for me to yield.’

‘ I will certainly see her as soon as possible.’

‘ Then tell her also—’

Mr. Herbert waited patiently.

‘ That I am a widow,’ said Geraldine, in a hollow voice.



CHAPTER VI.

Il entre bien des sortes de sentimens dans la composition des larmes.—MME. DE SÉVIGNÉ.

G WEN listened to Mr. Herbert's words with an intensity of anguish far beyond what her manner betrayed. Silent, motionless as a statue, did she sit after his departure, and contemplated the desolation of Geraldine, the death of Ippolito, till at length nature brought mercifully to her relief a flood of tears—a bitter tribute to their woe. Both rose before her in their youth, and beauty, and buoyant spirits. The remembrance of the feelings which Ippolito had once not unsuccessfully striven to stir within her (not the feelings themselves) revived. Many a time had Gwen in secret buried her burning face in her hands, as she detected with angry shame the difficulty with which she banished from her musings the memory of those moments in which she had believed in her influence over his heart, and of the mortification of being undeceived. But she had fought and conquered, and had learned to rejoice that her dream had been so short. A change now came over her spirit, and the sole sentiment which retained possession of her bosom was a tender compassion, which impelled her to watch over Geraldine and pour balm into her wounds for her own sake, and for the sake of Ippolito.

Gwen first told her mother all that she had herself seen and heard in the hospital.

‘Is it possible? Good heavens!—to think of Diane’s child—to think of her thus!’

‘Oh! mother, and to think that God has sent me to her!’

‘My dearest Gwen!’

Gwen bowed down her head on her mother’s bosom, and wept.

And now she had to regain self-command sufficient for the full revelation of this disastrous history. Mrs. Owen heard in silence—that silence which befits the entombment of the irreparable past, when we shed tears over the grave of hopes that have no rising, and strive with mute attention to catch the accents of mercy floating on the air.

‘We can understand now,’ at last observed Mrs. Owen, ‘the idea she has given those around her that she had neither friend nor home to seek. My dear child, she must find both with us. She seems to turn to you in love now.’

Gwen felt that she must use caution in suggesting to Geraldine the hope of removal from a place associated with so much horror. The first time that she was allowed to see her she did not utter one word with reference to Mr. Herbert’s communication; yet Geraldine knew that she felt for her, and, what was even of more value, for Ippolito. A ghastly paleness overspread her face. When Geraldine could speak, she said:

‘Now, tell me, where is Catherine?’

‘Gone—gone to Florence in search of you.’

‘Is it possible? Has she shown such devotion to me?—not to *me*.’

‘Yes, indeed, Geraldine—to you as much as to *her*. You cannot doubt how much she has always loved you.’

‘Ah! no, I cannot.’

‘I should like to write to her at once; she must be undergoing great anxiety on your account.’

‘Yes, and the poor *Nonna*—dear *Nonna*!’

‘Who is she?’

Geraldine shuddered. ‘*Our* grandmother,’ she an-

swered, in a low voice. 'There, don't write anything to-day—I must consider a little.'

Geraldine, when next Gwen visited her, was removed to the convalescent ward, which gave more comfort and privacy to their interview. Indeed, she was absolutely alone, for her few companions were gone, 'to do as I shall never do again,' said Geraldine—'to walk in the garden. Oh! Gwen, if you could imagine—but you can't—how I shut my eyes sometimes, and see the gardens of Italy round me. But now I have no time to waste; I want to write to my *Nonna*; sit down. Write it any way you can, and send it when you get home.'

She began to dictate rapidly in Italian, with some incoherence:

'Most dear, most revered,—You have suffered so much that it does not matter what one tells you now. It is no mortal hand which can make your burden heavier or lighter. Your poor child—I am your child, you know, for I did belong to *him*, and now my heart is all his again, as it was. Oh! *Nonna mia*, do you think he knows it? Your poor child has been too ill to write to you, and this is from an hospital—yes, like the one you took me into—and kind souls, kind as Suor Teresa Margarita, have had the care of me, for the tidings you sent by the hand of the *canonico* drove me wild, mad, distracted, into the streets. I wandered I know not where—I was knocked down—crushed by wheels. Oh! I have suffered, and I shall always suffer; and I was carried here, and opened my eyes at last from the phrensy of fever, and looked about for you, for you were my first thought in such a place, but you were not *here*. I could remember nothing—not even whence I wandered; so I have lost all I had, except your dear book, *Nonna mia*; I had that in my pocket, and that terrible letter within it I cannot tell you what is to become of me. I can never walk again, I am certain, though they won't say so; I know it. I have no money to come to you. Perhaps they will let me lie here till I die—'

‘Oh! Geraldine, I must not write such things—so unnecessarily painful. You cannot believe this will be while my mother and I have a roof over our heads. Our home is yours from the day you quit this place.’

‘Can you really take me to your home?’ cried Geraldine, in accents of joy and gratitude which made Gwen’s heart thrill with delight. She bent down and kissed her, saying :

‘Yes, when it is fit for you to go.’

Geraldine clasped her thin hands, and tears rolled down her cheek. Presently she said :

‘Write : ‘God has sent a friend of my childhood to find me out. She writes this for me ; she forbids me to say that I am homeless, forsaken, for that her home shall be my home, her mother my mother, and she my sister. Thank God for this, my dear *Nonna*, for in your prayers you won’t forget your unworthy child, her sorrows, nor her sins. She tells me, too, that my nurse is gone to Florence to seek me. You she must have found, and perhaps you both deplore me as lost. Tell her I am safe—tell her to come home again ; and believe me, dear *Nonna*, she is a Christian like you, and will teach me to ask God’s pardon. You must grant me yours, and grant it soon, lest I die.’

‘Gwen,’ exclaimed Geraldine, breaking off, ‘if I could add two lines with my own hand, oh! the difference they would make to her and to me! And I cannot, will not breathe them to any other living ear, nor let them meet any other living eye.’ Passionately she spoke, and her whole feeble frame quivered, as it were, with agony and anxiety.

‘I am sure,’ said Gwen, earnestly, ‘I could so arrange it for you.’ And without one thought of self, or one repining at there being anything that Geraldine would still withhold from her, she set herself to the accomplishment of the wish, and was sufficiently rewarded by success.

Geraldine, with trembling fingers, wrote : ‘I dare not speak of pardoning any one—least of all, *him*. Oh! may God forgive us both!’

‘There—take it—take it and go.’

Gwen obeyed. She despatched this letter at once, resolving to write to Catherine with further consideration ; but the very next day a letter from Catherine herself arrived. It was written in great anxiety, and she applied to Gwen for help. She said that on reaching Florence the first reply that she gained to her inquiries was the disclosure of the Count Ippolito’s fall in a duel which had caused great excitement, and of the fact of the Countess Geraldine’s departure the day previous to the catastrophe, which was commented on with every possible conjecture. She (Catherine) had not for a moment doubted that she set out for the purpose of reaching her mother. She found her way with considerable difficulty into the house of mourning, accompanied by one who promised to make her purpose understood, and to obtain the information she required ; but the old countess had retreated, almost beyond the possibility of reaching her, into the bosom of one of her own religious communities, and an aged steward seemed too much absorbed by grief for the loss of the last of the house to bestow much thought even on the widow of him whom he lamented. ‘She is gone from us—gone to her own friends—her own country ; so much the better. Let her not come back to this desolate abode.’ Catherine had, however, obtained from them Geraldine’s address in London ; she could see but two explanations of her silence. Had she instantly set out again for Italy, or had she fallen ill in a lonely lodging ? Would Gwen go there and inquire, and do whatever suggested itself to her as expedient ? On the point of her own return, she must be guided by circumstances, as to the precise date of departure.

The moment that Gwen had read this letter she hastened to the house in ——— Street, to which it directed her. There she found the lodgings relet, and the few (really valuable) things which Geraldine had brought with her, under lock and key ; the fulness of

knowledge with which she spoke forced an unwilling conviction on the people that their owner was found. All that Gwen asked to remove for the present was Mary's Bible, and possessed of this she was soon at Geraldine's side.

'I have brought you something that you will rejoice to have,' and she placed the Bible before her. A gleam of delight lit up Geraldine's wan face.

'It seems like a token of God's coming favour. He took it from me, and grants it me again to prize as I never prized it yet! But how could you find it?'

'I have a letter from Catherine, and in it is the name of the street, the number of the house—'

The moment Geraldine heard, she seemed to remember them distinctly. When Catherine's letter was proffered to her by Gwen she thankfully accepted it, and read it with few words and many tears.

Gwen, returning home, answered Catherine, on the chance of reaching her still in Florence.





CHAPTER VII.

Io voglio

Star presso a te ; voglio occultar nel tuo grembo
La faccia e piangere. Con te
Piangere io posso.

MANZONI.

‘**D**EAR mother, you know that Geraldine may now actually be removed ; the two rooms above are vacant. I have been looking at them, and see very well that one would do for her bedroom ; if you could make a sitting-room of the other, you would be close to her great part of the day, and in the evening (at least, when she is better) on my return I could place her on a couch and wheel her in there, and we could all be together. I can take on myself the additional rent this will add to our lodgings very well ; I am sure I can, mother. You know, nothing is more just than that she should derive benefit from the education her mother bestowed on me.’

‘And I, Gwen?—am I to do nothing? You are not very just nor generous here.’

‘But, mother, you are to do so much, so very much more than I can. First, you may furnish these rooms for her, and then when she is in them, you must be her chief comfort. She wants a comforter—an instructor, I suppose I may say ; and who can be like you for that?’

There was a joyful satisfaction felt by both mother and daughter, sweet as any they had ever known, when they contemplated what it was now in their power to do for and to be to Diane’s child.

At first the tranquillity of their home, the thoughtfulness of their attention, was inexpressibly soothing to Geraldine. The silence and privacy of her chamber afforded a valuable contrast to the situation from which she was removed, and withdrawal from the sight of others' sufferings allowed her nerves to regain strength. Still, in spite of Gwen's arrangements to be with her as much as the health of the one and the avocations of the other permitted, poor Geraldine had more hours of solitude than as yet she knew how to make a salutary use of, or could even endure without considerable injury. In the hospital, the presence of the nurse, the daily visit of the surgeon, the soothing, sustaining lessons of Mr. Herbert—nay, even the sights and sounds of many faces and various woes, and the coming to and fro of strangers—circumstances which she at first had rejoiced to escape from—had combined to prevent the constant pressure of the cross which now threatened to crush her. Here the past was her present; there she had a present apart from it. Future had she none. There was no hope of further cure held out to her, and Geraldine again recurred to what she had earlier said to Mr. Herbert, that all that God now assigned her was to lie there with her sin and her sorrow ever before her. Mrs. Owen and Gwen saw with grief her gradual wasting away, more under the deep despondency of her spirit than from any new bodily malady. In their distress and anxiety, they had recourse to her former medical attendant, who had shown a very warm benevolence towards her. He came to see her, and he could do nothing more. But one came who could do much; this was Catherine.

She arrived one day unexpectedly.

'I received Miss Owen's letter—where is my dear child?' were her first words.

'Here,' replied Mrs. Owen, with soothing kindness.

'Do you think I may see her at once?—In what state is she?'

'I must not conceal that it is one which will shock

and alarm you. However, I am inclined to hope more from your return than from anything else.'

'Oh! in mercy,' cried Catherine, with clasped hands and a sob of anguish, 'find some corner for me, that I may be my child's nurse. Kind as you may be, she will still welcome my services.'

'She will, indeed,' replied Mrs. Owen, deeply touched. 'The strictest secrecy is what she lays chief stress on, and really I believe it to be absolutely necessary; further agitation might destroy her. Here it is effected with ease. People in general need never suspect that she is more to us than a lodger in the same house, whose sad condition moves our compassion. Her name is wholly unfamiliar; she has chosen that of a second title in her husband's family—thus everything is arranged on a permanent footing, and we do not see how to devise a better.'

'With one difference, ma'am; for me to be near her—and, indeed, I do not know how to keep any longer away—'

'Well, let me go and prepare her a little, before you enter,' replied Mrs. Owen; and repairing to Geraldine's room, she seated herself near her, and said:

'My dearest child, here are at last some news of Catherine. You may hope to see her before long.'

'That is all I have to wish for now,' replied Geraldine, sighing.

'And are you desirous to have the wish fulfilled, or would you rather wait awhile?'

'Oh! it cannot be fulfilled too soon for me.'

'It might be so very speedily.'

'What would you say?' said Geraldine; 'Do you mean days, hours, minutes?—Is she here?'

She scanned Mrs. Owen's countenance as she spoke, and read her answer in it.

'She is!—bring her—bring her!' She sank back on her pillows, gasping.

'I will, when you have had a few minutes to recover your surprise—'

‘No, no, now;—surprise is nothing. Reality, reality, and that no delay alters.’

Mrs. Owen understood, and believed her. She sought Catherine, who had crept up to the very door of the room. Geraldine had hitherto felt an impulse to hide herself at the approach of every eye which had looked on her in other days; but she felt it not at Catherine’s. She eagerly strained forward to meet her embrace, stretching out her thin arms.

‘My child!’ Catherine held her to her bosom. Mrs. Owen left them.

When Gwen returned, she heard of Catherine’s arrival, and that she had seen Geraldine.

‘And how has Geraldine borne this?’

‘Better than I expected. It does not seem to me that strong emotions do her as much harm as uninterrupted reflection—’

‘So I was beginning to think.’

Catherine met Gwen with the most affectionate and fervent gratitude. Every act of kindness towards ‘her child’ was as if towards herself. And certainly Geraldine did not, on that evening, greet Gwen’s return with less than usual warmth.

Nevertheless Gwen, in her own chamber, asked herself ‘Why did I not feel more pleasure, when I heard that Catherine was here, and with Geraldine?’

Gwen had many selves: one that asked questions, and one that answered them; one that reproved, and one that justified; one that stirred up wrath, and one that whispered peace. Numerous are the inward voices heard by those who accustom themselves to self-examination; who commune with their own hearts, and are still—voices which can be heard distinctly only by those who are still. A half-smothered, confused clamour may indeed disturb others who have no inclination to give time and thought to the discovery of what these different tones are uttering; it may destroy their peace of mind, and distract the attention which they would fain bestow on outward things, and this is

all it operates. But they who lend a listening ear, and mark each cause of this inner tumult, each claim of the various pleaders in their breasts, learn to understand what the wise man meant when he said, 'He that ruleth his spirit is mightier than he that taketh a city.'

Gwen asked: 'What was moved within me?—A feeling that now Catherine is come, she will be much more to Geraldine than I have been or can be? She has loved Catherine like a second mother, and to me she only now begins to yield a grateful affection. No doubt, whatever I can bestow would be more acceptable from Catherine's hand. The very way in which I minister to Geraldine separates me from her. I go out, and toil through the day. I come back wearied, and often dull; my spirit worn by many petty vexations. The incessant routine of teaching children does not satisfy half the requirements of my nature; I am forced to deny space and light to it. I forbid my thoughts to expand; I stock the soil of my understanding with common plants for daily use; few beautiful flowers, no wide-spreading tree with its delicious shades, can be admitted there. All this I sometimes feel keenly. But I have my spring of water in a thirsty land, and when I put my lips to it, my spirit is refreshed. To 'work with my hands the thing that is good, that I may have to give to those that need;' that is my refreshment—and oh! how fortunate that Geraldine should first have seen me in my happiest, softest mood! Else she might not have yielded even the portion of love which she has bestowed.

'But now—to-day, it crossed my mind that just as I am beginning to win her heart, another comes, whose presence leaves only gratitude for me, who have thirsted for love! Gratitude!—yes, that is to be earned, and whatever is to be earned may belong to me, for I can toil. It will be Catherine's to sit and watch her, and whisper words of consolation and tenderness, to soothe her wounded spirit; and mine to go out and labour,

to provide for her daily wants. And with whom will be her fondness? Be it so. One thing both must recognise—mine is a labour of love; they cannot doubt that; and love cannot surely long exist without kindling love in return. I'll not believe it. Why should I deem their hearts so narrow that they can find no space in them for me? Ah! this is a sweeter, better thought than any that have gone before. We are not many, but one—one in Christ. They who meet in Him, cannot be divided from each other: here is unity—here is peace and love!

Now Gwen could pray, and after praying she could sleep; and in the morning, when she stood by Geraldine's side, she read a satisfaction in her looks beyond what she had seen yet. Geraldine held out her arms to her, and said:

'Gwen, how very merciful God is to me to let this poor aching heart again love and be loved!'

Gwen stooped down and kissed her forehead; then, in a suppressed voice, she replied:

'Yes, Geraldine; and there are still those who esteem your love as among the most precious things they can possess, and I am one of them.'

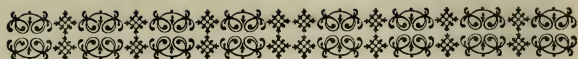
'So it seems,' said Geraldine, with wonder. 'But why, or how this can be, I cannot tell.'

'Never mind how or why,' said Gwen; 'believe that it is.'

A mode was devised for placing Catherine near Geraldine, and none were more prompt in devising it than Gwen.

This was the household—Gwen and Catherine, energetic and helpful; Mrs. Owen and Geraldine, suffering, grateful, and resigned.





CHAPTER VIII.

Un de ces hommes des mains duquel une âme échappe difficilement, et aux quels l'on ne s'adresse que lorsqu'on vent sincèrement renoncer au vice et servir Dieu.—MASSILLON.

'TELL me, Catherine,' asked Geraldine ; 'how could I be blind and indifferent to a noble character like Gwen's? How could I love and regard her so little?'

'Why, at that time, you did not set a due value on the qualities which you esteem now, and neither did Gwen possess them. There has been a great change in her since you were girls together. I can't say myself that I ever expected to see her *all* she is.'

'Oh! I thought that the change was solely in me.'

'Can you think that she was as gentle, as loving then as now?'

'No ; but I thought it was because there was so little to love in me then. Oh! how ashamed I am when I reflect on those days. It is a terrible conviction, and one which I shall never lose, that the faults of that period—trivial as they were called then, and might be called now, by those ignorant of their consequences—were the very seeds of all the great sins which came after, and great miseries too. I remember some lines out of a book which you would not like, Catherine, I know—a book which every one brings with them to Italy ; I learnt them long ago, and they have been ever since as if burnt into my memory :

. 'The thorns I reap are of the tree

I planted ; they have torn me and I bleed.

I might have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.'

'I do like those, as you use them,' replied Catherine, with tears in her eyes.

'Then, again, there is a line about 'feeding on bitter fruit without accusing fate,' and I try to do that.'

'No, no, my child, you must not speak to me of such fruit only. Liken yourself rather to the wanderers in the waste howling wilderness who came thirsting to the waters of Marah, and drew a bitter draught, but God, in His mercy, sweetened it.'

'Ah!—yes; He has! But still, Catherine, of those waters I need not have tasted. There were purer streams to which Mary would long since have led me to slake my thirst. In the wilderness I wasted the best years of my life, and resembled those rebellious children of whom you speak, who, you know, 'in the wilderness displeased God in many things.' But I wanted to talk to you of Gwen, not of myself. I wonder if she writes any verses now? Do you remember *Eulalia*? If she does, I should like to see them—like you to read them to me, as I lie here.'

Gwen, when made acquainted with this wish, produced, not without embarrassment, and that species of shyness which seems angry with itself and with the occasion of it, a clasped volume of MS.

'Most that I have written is in this—but don't be frightened at the size—you can open it where you please, and read what you like. I don't mind lending it to you.'

Gwen spoke with a degree of agitation that she felt might be incomprehensible or even ridiculous to others; then told herself that she deserved to be laughed at, an infliction to which she never had been, and never could become quite indifferent.

The thick volume usually lay on Geraldine's couch, and she often read to Mrs. Owen or to Catherine some piece which excited interest in her. To Gwen she one day said:

'It is impossible but that this book should make me know you much better and very differently in some things than I did before.'

‘I was aware of that when I gave it,’ replied Gwen, in the peculiar voice which with her signified ‘that within which passeth show.’

‘And love you more,’ continued Geraldine, timidly; ‘and feel that a nature like yours suffers more than other thoughtless natures ever think of. I understand how much I inflicted—very likely at the best—unintentionally as well as wilfully, I mean, Gwen.’

‘Far more unintentionally than intentionally, I am quite convinced now, Geraldine, whatever I may have thought then. Moreover, as it is my nature to show little of what I feel, it is not possible but that others should at times ignorantly hurt me. I am not so sensitive now—dwell less on myself, perhaps—I have less time and more besides to dwell on; these are among the reasons for the change, if change there be.

‘Certainly, I lent that book when you inquired for it, with a wish that it should make you understand me better—know something of the inner conflicts and emotions of my heart; chiefly, I think, in order that many things which may have seemed strange, and severe, and chilling, may seem less so for the future. You know, Geraldine, ice burns.’ And Gwen tried to smile.

‘Dearest Gwen! as if I could so greatly mistake you—now.’

‘I don’t think that you could,’ replied Gwen, repressing her emotion; ‘and I have all along mistaken you far more than you ever mistook me.’

‘I was not conscious of that; perhaps I perceived it a little sometimes.’

‘I dare say not; I was too insignificant for you to mark what impressions you were making on me; but that does not lead me the less to deplore that they were often most unjust. You suffered by my injustice, though you heeded it not. I might have loved and served you as a friend, if I had read you aright.’

‘You are indeed an invaluable friend to me now, dear Gwen; but don’t blame yourself for the past, for

indeed I don't think I should have endured any real friend then ; remember I had Catherine, and I rejected her counsels ; and Sir Francis, too, was good and kind. Only think, Gwen, of those words—so solemn—‘Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour and not suffer sin upon him,’ and ask yourself if I would have borne with friendship such as that ?

‘Nor let the sinner lose his soul at ease !’

murmured Gwen to herself, and then added, in reply to Geraldine :

‘Perhaps not ; but that does not lessen my faultiness.’

‘Well, then, it does mine ; one advantage less abused, one warning less unheeded ; and abused, unheeded they would have been. I feel that here. No pleadings but those of my own passionate, wilful heart had a chance of being listened to then.’

Poor Geraldine pressed her hands on her heart as she spoke, with an expression of pain, which made Gwen think that it would be prudent to break off the conversation. Geraldine saw, and checked the impulse :

‘Don't go away. I have something to say to you about these verses still. Read me this poem.’

‘Ah ! my first sonnet,’ cried Gwen, and she took the book from Geraldine's hand, and obeyed :

‘I venerate thine earnestness of tone,
Thy faithful pleading with the list'ning few.
'Tis that thou deemest all thy store their due,
And thou enough art recompensed if one
Learneth of thee to fall before the throne,
Shedding as he had never shed before
His contrite tears upon the sapphire floor.
May thy reclaiming power in me be shown !
I thus a silent gratitude would prove.
May meek obedience to thy teaching given
Add yet a leaf unto thy crown in Heaven,
The victor's crown that is reserved above
For the true shepherds, who have zealous striven
Christ's scattered flock to bring again in love.’

‘And now, why, when did you write this?’

‘I wrote it after I had the habit of listening to a preacher for some little time, who appeared to me to possess the gift of extraordinary intellect. When first he came to a neglected district, he found the house of God frequently almost without worshippers. Still, were there many, were there few, the same thrilling, intense earnestness pervaded every tone. I felt, ‘Were I sitting here alone, not another eye directed towards him, thus would he plead for my solitary soul.’ Such was my conviction when I wrote those lines. Never shall I forget the emotion with which I one evening heard him say, ‘If the souls that are lost could return to grasp those means of grace which they once neglected or scoffed at, this house would be thronged; I should not be preaching as I am now to empty seats.’ I felt as people are described to have felt at Massillon’s famous sermon—the separation of the goats from the sheep—don’t you remember how Mdlle. Vernet used to tell us that they sprang to their feet, looking round them as if the hour were come: I sat still in a dark corner. When I returned home, it was a relief to me to write that poem. But now it is no longer thus. God has blessed the labourer who laboured indefatigably. He has given the increase to the seed faithfully sown and carefully watered; and when I see the multitude of listening faces, I admire the same unvarying simplicity accompanying the same unslackened zeal.’

‘And is this the clergyman of the district in which we are living?’

‘Yes; I should be very sorry to remove to another.’

‘You told me you did not think that I could expect Mr. Herbert to attend me here, engaged as he is in his own peculiar office.’

‘I did.’

‘Do you believe that Mr. Vere would come?’

‘He does visit my mother. Lately he has been

absent—ill—fatigued, I dare say ; before Christmas he will be here. I will ask him to see you.’

‘But I feel rather frightened.’

‘I don’t think that Mr. Vere will frighten you. The heartless, the proud, the vain, the giddy,—I can believe that each and all would shrink from him ; but the sick, the sorrowful, the poor, the young,—I have seen them welcome his approach with a delight which certainly I did behold with surprise at first. Towards such he relaxes from all that could be called severity. One can see that there have been great struggles necessary with his own nature, and such as ever leave scars on the face and in the heart. I have at times looked at him, and thought of Jeremy Taylor’s expressions, speaking of a good man : ‘When his anger is removed, and his spirit becalmed, and his brow made even as the brow of Jesus.’ One can guess what it cost to remove that anger, to becalm that spirit, to make that brow even,—and even it cannot always remain. He has cares on every side, too—domestic and public ; think of a man with abilities like his, gaining scarce a scanty pittance for the support of wife and children. It seems extraordinary ; it is lamentable.’

‘And his wife, what is she like ?’ asked Geraldine, with interest.

‘I think her very like Collins’s ‘Mercy.’’

‘I don’t know anything about her ; you always forget my extreme ignorance.’

‘You must read how she hung on War, ‘and looked his wrath away.’ But I am talking wild nonsense to you,—as if this minister of peace were at all like war ! My meaning is, that in him one sees with remarkable distinctness what nature designed, and what grace has moulded ; and I always feel sensible that there is somewhat in my own nature which makes me understand and sympathise with his in a greater degree than most people can. Had he not learned humility at the feet of Jesus, his satire would have lashed, his scorn would have withered whoever encountered him in ‘a right

asserting attitude of soul,' when defying the laws of God, and misleading the weak and ignorant. But he would have been ever too generous to level a single shaft at the fallen—the repentant. No hand knows the true art of healing better than his. Is not this admirable ?

‘Very ; but alarming.’

‘No, no, not so. I would bring him to you in preference to any other.’

‘Yet all that you say is as different as possible from Mr. Herbert, whom I liked so much.’

‘That is true—quite a contrast ; but still I think you will derive good from the one as well as from the other. And you see you do not choose him, but have fallen naturally under his charge, therefore you may reasonably look to benefit by it.’

Gwen thought that the very peculiarities of Mr. Vere might awaken interest in Geraldine, and, drawing her out of herself, lighten her heavy load of despondency. Mrs. Owen and her daughter spoke to Mr. Vere of Geraldine as of one ‘who has suffered, and has still to suffer, so terribly, that not the sternest of her judges but would shrink from adding the weight of a feather to her present burden.’

‘If a man be gold, the fire purges him ;’ thought Mr. Vere. These were the last words that he had read ere he left his study. He proved the metal, and he found it gold, and thenceforward he showed Geraldine a compassionate kindness, resembling rather the affectionate reception of the prodigal by his father, than any colder greeting.





CHAPTER IX.

That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures.

WORDSWORTH.

MRS. OWEN'S illness was increased by the severity of winter, and Gwen resolved to remove her to Hastings, to mitigate her sufferings, if not to prolong her life. Her mother felt that it would be cruel to deny her devoted child this last gratification. Gwen communicated the intention to her cousin.

‘It need make little difference to you, dear. Catherine will be with you, and as soon as ever the weather becomes more genial, you will see us back.’

Gwen spoke abruptly, because she quitted Geraldine with pain and reluctance. Geraldine heard her without reply. This silence struck Gwen almost immediately after she left her. ‘She has thought me cold, regardless of her in my anxiety for my mother. Oh! this must not be!’ She hastened back, and bending over her cousin, kissed her, and for once gave simple, unrestrained expression to her feelings.

‘Dearest Geraldine, I can scarcely bring myself to quit you, even for a time. In going, I hope to alleviate *her* sufferings, and I think God will send *me* back to you. Oh! yes, I have much to do, and much to undo and do better, before I can expect to rest with her.’ Gwen wept. To see Gwen weep was not like watching the easily shed tears of more pliable natures; hers were not refreshing showers, but a storm that

shook her, and subsided, not as if exhausted, but as if suspended by an imperative command. It was now Geraldine's turn to soothe and to comfort as she best could.

Geraldine repeated to Catherine all that Gwen had said: 'And now come here, and listen to me. I want to tell you everything. What do you think was the feeling which kept me silent when first Gwen spoke to me? I could not disguise from myself that it would afford me relief to lose sight for awhile of her unremitting devotion to her mother—of their mutual tenderness, and constant consideration of each other. Oh! Catherine, I used to hear a poor consumptive creature speak of feeling hot coals in her chest, and I, I have that sort of sensation mentally. Gwen little suspects that by her dutifulness she daily heaps coals of fire on my head! It seems so ungrateful to esteem her absence a relief! I reproach myself, yet cannot conquer the very sensation which creates the reproach.'

'My child, this is an appointed respite—you never asked or sought it. God sees that it is good for you, and mitigates mental suffering which was too severe—'

'For my weakness. But it seems like a sin to be glad to avert my eyes from such a holy spectacle. I fear, too, that I am losing a wholesome admonition.'

'But certainly you cannot venture to retard their departure. It is very desirable to remove Mrs. Owen, and impossible to remove you. Therefore, it is plainly your duty to believe that all is for the best.'

Geraldine yielded to the force of Catherine's arguments, and undoubtedly gained greater repose of mind from being left alone with her than she had yet known. To all the change was beneficial: Gwen and her mother thankfully accepted of uninterrupted communion with each other, and Geraldine unburdened her bosom of the secrets too long pent up within.

'You think that it will kill me to talk of the past, Catherine, but you are mistaken; I know the contrary. It must be done. I can't live with this weight here

on my breast, and would not die so. Nor would I unburden myself of it to any human being but you. Oh ! let me speak now, dearest Catherine.'

'If it must be so, my child—'

'It must—it must. I am not going back to the details of my flight—why should I? a guilty dream, that is what it seems like—a tissue of deceit, scarcely of my own weaving—a remembrance of madness, almost in itself maddening.'

'I cannot bear, cannot allow this. It is but sapping the little strength you have left. You yourself have just said it was useless.'

'So it is—except in one respect—I must confess one suspicion which has crossed my mind—which it is good and humiliating to examine into—I cannot help sometimes suspecting that I was urged on by impatience of restraint as well as by love. I don't want to say that it was Lady Rivers, or Mr. Faulkner, or any but myself who plunged me into sin and rebellion. I would indeed far rather believe that love alone impelled me—love for one well calculated to inspire it in a heart which did not estimate any qualities according to their true value. I do not like this mixture of motives—I do not like to acknowledge that it was in the power of others to impel me to action at the very moment when I most proudly asserted that I despised their authority. Yet they mainly shaped my course, while I was glorying in shaping it myself. If they had studied my character a little closer, they, too, might have come at this secret, and have learned that to urge me towards one path was to ensure my pursuit of another. Perverseness—that was my bane—the common bane of an over-indulged temper, and yet it seems so little, so contemptible ! But I must not follow out this till I carry it beyond matter of fact, and deceive you. Whatever of perverseness and of self-will mingled with my love—love there was—enough to satisfy Ippolito even in his first requirements. I cannot describe to you the vehemence and the jealousy of his passion—jealousy of

my every thought, word, and look, and deed. He would not let me weep for my mother. Every old feeling must be absorbed in the new one for him. My past was to be annihilated. My present, my future, were to be him ; and so it was, for awhile ; I gave all he asked, and for awhile no speech but his sounded in my heart ; but the echoes of far-off voices, far-off in distance and in time, began again at intervals to reach my ear—torturing yet delighting it. Then would I sit, covering my face, closing my eyes, bending down my head between my hands, listening to and answering those dear accents, and Ippolito would rouse me from my trance, not by the honied words of earlier days—music sweeter than memory could make—but by harsh, discordant tones which stirred up wrath in me. Catherine, you have seen me in my childish fits of passion too often for me to need to tell you what they were like. Oh ! to think that such scenes should have become of constant recurrence between my husband and me—no longer children—he a man, I a woman. How despicable in our violence ! I was ashamed of them more than he was—but not as I have been since—not as I am now ! You will want to know how Madame Baldovini received us when we first arrived at Paris. She did not welcome us. There was a great deal of upbraiding, and of downright scolding, which I thought very vulgar, and should have resented as such with scorn and anger, perhaps, but that I was really insensible to everything but Ippolito, except being excessively frightened at what I had done ;—like a child who has ventured on some dangerous act which it had been warned against, commanded not to do, and then screams with terror, and clings to its nurse, to any one for protection. I hushed my screams, and clung to Ippolito, and felt that I had none else on earth. He heeded his mother very little, he never did, and he was too happy in me then to repent. Everything she said about imprudence passed by him like the wind ; he had neither

concern with nor knowledge of anything that she wrote to England. I am certain that then he never wasted a thought on my forfeited wealth, or on any means of recovering it. He did not care to conciliate ; he only exulted. I doubt whether he would not have laughed the freest pardon to scorn ; and as to apology, I dared not hint at it. Oh ! what idolatry he lavished on me ! and I, I lived on that intoxicating draught, till every other was rejected as tasteless. What could this produce but a fever of the heart ? Yes, there is a fever of the heart as well as of the brain—I have known both now. There is no more for me to know, I think.'

'My dear child,' said Catherine, on whose arm Geraldine's head was pillowed ; 'there are other springs in which to allay those fevers which have tortured your past existence. Blessed be God who hath brought your parched lips to them. Drink freely of the river of life that welletth from the throne, bending low in self-abasement, and when you raise your eyes you may fix them hopefully on the bow that encompasseth it in its beauty.'

Geraldine listened to these soothing words like the child rocked to peace on its nurse's bosom, the tears trickling softly down her wan cheeks.

'Yes, Catherine, and do not deem me trifling for thinking on those old nursery lines about the rainbow. I have often fancied, and I can't help the fancy coming into my mind now, that the rainbow of the morning is just like the foolish, extravagant hopes of earthly happiness, the greater its brilliancy, the more surely the foreboder of storms and tears ; and the rainbow of the evening resembles the holy joy produced by contemplating the bliss of the city of God, and a faint resemblance of that 'rainbow like unto an emerald,' which shineth there, uttering no false promises, a true betokener of a joyful resurrection and a coming dawn, after the brief welcome rest of the grave.'

'Catherine,' said Geraldine, after a pause, 'I wonder

sometimes whether I should ever have withdrawn my lips from that fount of earthly bliss if it had continued sweet to my taste—I hardly think so ; but it grew bitter, bitter as gall. It was not those passing storms of which I have spoken that did the work of destruction ;—many of them cleared away, and all was as bright and smiling as, or more bright and smiling than before. But Ippolito changed, and I changed ; change in me did not in the slightest degree proceed from that fickleness of nature which produced it in him. The expiring of his love was as the fading of culled flowers which often excites not even a passing regret in those who culled them ; the death of mine was like that of the tree torn up by the tempest, which puts forth green leaves even after its fall, a mockery to its shattered limbs and to the decay that is in its heart.’





CHAPTER X.

Il non piangeva, sì dentro impietrai.

DANTE.

‘**M**ADAME BALDOVINI,’ continued Geraldine, ‘soon became convinced that she had not the least chance of conciliating Mr. Faulkner. I never wished that she should attain the purpose which she had in view. I could have ill endured that he should portion me out of his wealth, as he once intended to do, after I had treated his wishes and his counsels with scorn and disregard, and not turned any of his past gifts to the use he meant them for. Madame Baldovini guessed at a repugnance she was incapable of sharing. I never expostulated with her, because I never saw the least danger of her success. Nor did I approach the subject with Ippolito, for he disregarded, and I was glad to avoid it. As autumn came on, he proposed our return to Italy. Madame Baldovini informed us that she intended to remain in Paris. She told us a profusion of reasons why it was much better that she should do so; Ippolito listened with an indifference that galled her, though she could bear to separate herself from him very well. For me—I had lost all that fictitious fondness which I felt for her at Lascelles. She left off flattering me very soon. No doubt she was angry with me for giving myself without wealth to Ippolito, and jealous of his exclusive devotion to me. We departed, and about six months afterwards she wrote us word that she was thinking of a second marriage,

which accordingly took place,—it was with a Parisian. She may be in Paris at this moment.

‘I set out for Italy with rainbow hopes of no faint hue, I assure you, dear Catherine, and brighter days than those we passed at Como never shone on mortal. Oh! the sweet tones of music and of poetry we interchanged with each other in our fairy boat. Our beauty and our song soon attracted and enchanted others as well as ourselves. My husband met with former friends, and made new ones; at first I looked on them all as intruders on my happiness, but they welcomed me among them with a graceful kindness which I could not withstand. Even then and there, I saw and heard things that startled and shocked me from time to time. Think, Catherine, how young and girlish I was then! I did not comment on them even to Ippolito.

‘Some Milanese friends detained us for the *Vendemmia*—their vintage-time, you know. What a scene of enchantment it was! At last we went on to Florence, and arrived in the rainy season. Superstitious feelings often creep over me when I think how dreary and dismal my first days were. Our *palazzo* was on the sunless side of the Arno. How deserted it looked! Large, lofty apartments, with painted, or tapestried walls, and marble floors, almost bare of furniture—what there was retaining some vestiges of past magnificence, but not a trace of present beauty;—and how cold! ‘Is this your climate, Ippolito?’ I cried, and he was offended with me; he did not like to see me shudder and shiver, and no one in the house had the slightest idea of warming it for me. They explained that a blazing fire of fossil coal, such as we English accustomed ourselves to, was utterly incompatible with health, and they brought me a ‘*scaldino*,’ which I hated.

‘Well, enough of such trifles; suffice it to say that every detail of domestic life was contrary to my previous habits, and you know how little I was inured

to any sort of privation or self-denial, how utterly without any principle of accommodation. Still I was young, and happy when I did not think of the remorseful past—for remorseful it was at all times in a greater or less degree. I never was quite dead to it, like Ippolito. What, indeed, was it to him, to think of my mother, compared to what it was to me? I am sure that none of the trifles I have named would have discomfited me much or long, if there had been no graver sources of disquiet. You must know, Catherine, that according to the Italian custom my husband took me not to a home of his own, but that of his grandfather, who, with his grandmother, still lived, and resided in the palace, and were in all respects the '*Padroni*.' We took our meals with them, and anything more insupportably wearisome than the society the old Count gathered round him cannot be imagined. But Ippolito and I escaped in the beautiful equipage, which was all that he had to take a pride in—the only showy thing he was allowed to possess—to our daily drive in the Cassine; and he loved to look on me at his side, and gloried in my yet unimpaired beauty. At night we had our balls and our theatres in abundance—only that there came a grievous mortification on us both alike, and I was partly the cause of it, I believe—I suspect.

'I must explain to you how matters stood with us. You see that we were expected to make our first appearance before the old Count and Countess in the character of penitents, to ask to be forgiven, and to declare ourselves willing to submit to any punishment they thought fit to inflict, and a great deal more of that sort of thing. But it was not likely that I who had defied my own parent and guardian, should be very deferential to those of Ippolito. His demeanour towards them had really a vast deal of submission in it—far more than he showed to his mother. But I looked on all this as merely a matter of form, and therefore regarded it but little, until I began to find that

it was to go beyond words ; then I rebelled, at first inwardly. I was surprised, startled, not quite prepared as to the manner in which I would defend my dignity and assert my independence. But mind, Catherine, I was only in suspense—not dreaming of obedience, nor even of conciliation.

‘Now, the old Count Giustiniano was a tyrant in his very inmost heart ; such an one as those who have read of Italian tyrants in old times may picture to themselves. I verily believe that he would have been a worthy member of the fraternity. Oh ! that horrible torture-chamber, at Venice, which I once saw ; no doubt he would have invented such instruments as it contains with delight, and have used them too ! I see you are shocked to hear me hazard such imputations, half in jest—bitter jest—half in earnest ; I suppose it is very wrong. Well, I will tell you of something you will better like to hear. I lie here now, and forgive that old man all, and it seems little that I have to forgive him. At that time I used to think myself martyred by him ; now I acknowledge how insignificant was all he could inflict, compared to what I have since inflicted on myself. What were the tortures his malevolence could occasion me beside those which my own evil passions fastened on me ! No enemy like oneself,—none, none.

‘You know the words in the Psalms, Catherine, ‘My soul hath long dwelt among those who are enemies to peace ;’ (is that right ?) So dwelt my soul ! This is never so deeply, truly realized, as by those who have their enemies within. There were mine !’

Geraldine lay awhile in silence ; then starting suddenly, she exclaimed :

‘Catherine, did you ever see the pictures in Florence ?’

‘No, indeed, I was too sick at heart to see after any sights, Miss Geraldine. I did wander about the churches sometimes, and saw some poor souls at their prayers who touched me, and I prayed by their side

without their knowing that a heretic was there. Then the beggars used to annoy me, thinking, I suppose, that those at their devotions were most likely to consider them ; but they might have waited, I thought.'

'Ah ! well, I was not thinking of sights, Catherine, but I do wish that you had seen a picture which linked itself painfully with my feelings. Often have I stood gazing on it till I thought it would have the old power ascribed to that of which it was the representation, freeze my blood, and turn me to stone*—the Medusa, you know, with all her snaky horrors ! Chill and hard my heart grew as I looked on it ; not a sigh nor a sob coming to its relief. Strange, that at such moments I could speculate about the crowd around me ; yet I did. I used to wonder whether there was one among them who could suspect, guess at what was at work in the heart, while they gazed, as they seldom failed to do, on the face of the proud, cold English-woman who stood there in her beauty—and her misery ! This picture—I see it before me now ! I do not often let imagination place it there in my waking hours, when I have any power of rejecting or summoning up her images. I think some plague-stricken wretch must have furnished the painter with his choice of its hues. It might personify the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness,' bearing her malady in herself, and diffusing it around—experiencing all its torments in her own flesh, yet pitilessly communicating them to others ; regardless of their sufferings, and commiserating her own with a look of such ghastly, horror-stricken, self-compassion ! and yet strangely beautiful withal ! Oh, Catherine ! how in my worst agony have I stood transfixed, as it were, before her !'

Geraldine covered her face, as if to shut out the image she had called up. When she looked up again, she said :

'This is all so wild, so odd, you find it difficult to

* The *Medusa* of Leonardo da Vinci.

understand ; but let me go on to the end, and then I will never mention the Medusa again.' She gave a hollow smile.

'Ippolito was fond of painting, and he insisted on teaching me to paint also when first I reached Italy. I was no great proficient ; but a strange fancy came into my head once, that I would try to copy that picture. I sent in a *supplica* (as they call it, and it was truly one when I made it, for my heart was set on obtaining what I asked), to be allowed to do so. Now, can you believe that I could have sat before it hour after hour, studying all its horrible details, and thinking as I should have thought, and have retained my reason? I don't. But I was not permitted to put it to such a test,—leave was refused ; and in revenge I tried at home to imitate it from memory on the day that I received the refusal. As I went on, I felt irresistibly impelled to make the features more and more like my own. I did not know whether I was succeeding or not, but I was working with increasing excitement, when suddenly Ippolito came in. It would have been natural to veil from other eyes a work so little agreeable to the sight as that which I was engaged in, but I made no such attempt. I continued in a sort of desperation. He came behind me and put his hand on my shoulder. 'Don't touch me,' I cried, in an abhorrent tone, I imagine.'

'My dear child ! impossible !' interrupted Catherine.

'Yes, yes ; it is quite possible. You don't know—you cannot comprehend such madness ; but I was capable of it then ; I cannot explain it yet. Let me go on. I shrank from him, shook him off, as if he had been one of the Medusa's snakes.

'What, in the name of Heaven, are you doing here?' he exclaimed, in a voice of surprise, yet with a half guilty look, as if he discovered some latent meaning in my work.

'I looked up at him with a dry, preoccupied manner, and said :

‘Do you see any likeness?’

‘To whom?’ he faltered; ‘To you?’ He seemed as if he would have withheld the words, which yet he was forced to utter.

‘I thought I should succeed,’ I said, with affected triumph in my skill, and bending down to give another touch; then glancing at him to see the effect of my words. He stood motionless, as it were. ‘Aha!’ I cried, ‘Medusa is working her spell on you. You never thought that *La bella Giralda* could be so transformed, did you? This,’ I said, passionately striking the paper with my finger, ‘this is what I am within! some day it will look out—look through the pretty mask I still wear.’ I tossed it towards him: ‘You may have it, if you like.’ He caught it, rent it through the middle, then into a hundred bits, which he scattered through the window. I was not sorry that the hideous thing was destroyed; I could have flung myself down and wept—I wish I had! tears might have softened him and me. After a while Ippolito came back from the window, and said to me in a constrained voice:


‘Giralda, if you are so unhappy here, you had better try to go back to your own home.’

‘No, no, no,’ I answered; ‘I will never ask Mr. Faulkner to take me into his house again.’—I did not add: ‘I will never confess to him how all his worst predictions have been verified.’

‘Now, I had been some years in Florence before all this happened. You see I have told it you quite out of its place. I can’t help it. I can’t repeat all this history just as if it were in a book; it must come as it can—as it will.’

Geraldine proceeded no further that evening. She had pierced her own heart and Catherine’s.





CHAPTER XI.

Si fatta pena
Che s'altra è maggior, nulla è sì spiacente.

DANTE.

‘I WISH to tell you some of the ingenious modes which the old Count invented for tormenting us,’ said Geraldine. ‘Listen. The first grand Court Ball in the beginning of the Carnival was talked of. Invitations had been issued, and I prepared a dress such as Ippolito thought suited to it. You have seen Antonio, the old *maggior domo*. I can fancy that he is now before me, dear, kind old man; not broken down with grief as you must have beheld him, but cheerful, courteous; he could not be cross with me, though I believe it did vex him that his young Padrone should have brought home a foreign bride with all her airs and her poverty to boot, and a heretic too! that made the old man regard me with suspicion; still I saw I could win him from the first. My youth, my beauty, and a playfulness which I then possessed, all melted his heart, and no one dealt more kindly by me in that household than did Antonio.

‘The morning of the ball it pleased the old man to call Ippolito and me to him while he unlocked the casket of jewels that was in his keeping, in the *Guardaroba*; he looked at them with fondness, as if they were living things that he had watched over, and cared for so many days. ‘And now,’ he asked, ‘which is the Contessa Giralda to wear this evening? Which will make her beauty yet more beautiful, render all the young Tuscan nobles envious of Ippolito and his

English bride, and cause them to wonder that she could think it worth while to come so far with such a scapegrace, or that her own countrymen could let her leave them? The old man delighted in paying me long compliments in the same bombastic language in which the very beggar in the street addresses you in his city. And what a different creature I was in return with Antonio and with the Count Giustiniano! There were some magnificent emeralds and pearls on which I at once fixed my choice; I always loved to wear green, you know. Ippolito took them out, and fastened them in my hair. '*Bella!*' he said, in a tone of fond admiration that thrilled me to the heart. 'Did I not right in bringing her here?' The old man, though looking on me with approving eyes, still seemed a little slow to assent. But Ippolito did not heed this. 'Ah! but to see her dance!' he exclaimed. 'Antonio, if you could see her dance!' 'Why not?' I cried, catching Ippolito's arm, and bidding him hum an air, while we both danced for the old man's pleasure on the spacious floor. What we began for his amusement, we continued for our own. He did not tire of watching us, and so engaged were we all that we never heard the *Portiera* rise and fall, nor observed the old Count standing looking on, until we heard a little peculiar *eh!* and dry inward laugh he had, which usually followed any successful attempt to *minchionnare*, deceive, trick others, as he delighted to do. As soon as we perceived him, he turned away to his own apartments. We felt ourselves checked in our merriment, we scarcely knew why, and old Antonio called after the Count as he disappeared: '*Non son altri che bambini, sa, Signor Conte.*' I forgot, Catherine, dear, you don't understand words grown as familiar to me as my mother tongue. He meant we were but children, and we rather resented the apology he offered for us.

'Evening came, and in all my splendid attire I descended to the *Sala* where the old Count and the Countess Umiliana were seated; there were assembled a few

relations of the family, and one or two of the train of priests in constant attendance on the Countess. I entered, and a general hum of admiration received me; not one could withhold a testimony of praise while I walked to and fro; '*per pavonneggiarsi*,' Ippolito said.

Geraldine wondered why Catherine started at the sound of that word; it was that she had never forgotten Gwen's use of it.

'I could not be prouder of myself than Ippolito was of me, nor than I was of him. Even the little Countess came out of the corner where she usually sat with her beads on her hand, and a book or two of devotions, and some coarse work for the poor; dear old soul! She offered a strange contrast to my magnificence and stately height. Of one of the noblest families of Florence, she wore a dress that a mendicant would scarcely deem worth accepting; the rustiest black silk gown you can fancy, with some sort of hood of the same material on her head, to which she added only a scarf when she went out. Age and abstinence had helped to make her diminutive, thin, and bent in a remarkable degree. Yet in spite of extreme insignificance of exterior, the Countess Umiliana's address was at once so dignified and so urbane, that none could refuse her their reverence nor their love. Oh! how good was that little, old, poor-looking woman! how immeasurably superior to any other person in that room! What real kindness and benevolence sparkled in her eyes as she then looked on me! I felt touched, and taking her hand, kissed it. Ippolito did the same. He too loved her, and was pleased to see her kind to me. 'And now, *Nonna mia*, it is time for us to proceed to the palace,' he said; 'good-night.' 'Gently, gently,' cried Count Giustiniano, in a voice that grated on our ears, 'no such haste as you think for. Come here, *mia bella Contessina*, and sit by me. I want to tell you and Ippolito a little discourse I held this morning with the Lord Chamberlain. We elders all agree that among the young people of Florence, there is no virtue we

desire more to see flourish than that of filial obedience and due reverence; any signal breach of it demands reproof which it would be most dangerous to neglect to administer. Now, you know, my dear children, your marriage has been not a little irregular; and although we have overlooked that, and have taken you to our house and our hearts, yet it may not be amiss, nay, it is all the more necessary, perhaps, that we should duly testify our disapprobation of such wilful proceedings as yours have been. I have thought it my duty to observe on all this, and through my good friend to get it properly represented to His Royal Highness, who in return has been graciously pleased to declare that my beautiful English daughter cannot be permitted to consider herself included in the invitations to the Court entertainments which are extended to the rest of our family. So you see, *cara mia*, that you need not proceed any further than this room to-night. Ippolito, if he please, may attend the ball, and entertain us to-morrow with an account of its splendour.'

'I shall never forget the malevolence of his face, nor the studied lengthiness of his speech, nor the skill with which he warded off all interruptions on Ippolito's part. As for me, I was too deeply wounded to offer any. His trick was at once so petty and so subtle. Can you conceive it, Catherine?' And even now Geraldine smarted at the recollection.

'No, indeed,' replied Catherine, 'I cannot.'

'Ippolito's disappointment and rage were excessive, but the latter was rather exhibited before his grandfather than directed against him. And now the Countess showed the kindness of her nature. She went up to her husband and put her hand on his arm, and said something to him in the nature of intercession, I have no doubt. 'Impossible,' replied the old man, shaking his head; 'the Grand Duke won't be mocked. It is not to be recalled now; but, Ippolito—he may go.'

'And did he?' asked Catherine, anxiously.

‘Oh! no; nothing would have made him leave me then, even if pride had not rebelled. For his sake, and that I might not gratify that cruel old man, I stifled my mortification. The Countess, as she returned to her corner, said, in passing me, in a soothing and a half-supplicating tone, ‘Patience, my child!’ I replied merely by a haughty toss of the head, as if I knew not what she meant. No; Ippolito left me not then, nor did he ever go to Court without me. After his grandfather’s death the restriction was removed, and we went together. But small was the triumph then attained. When the decree of banishment was first passed, the women rejoiced and the men lamented at the sudden eclipse of so much beauty; when it was revoked, I heard malicious whispers run through the crowd, meant for my hearing. The court ladies said, ‘Are these the marvellous charms which were to put us all to shame—to make us die of envy?’ These words were aimed more at my husband than myself; I knew the deadly injury designed, and I was as well aware as their malice could make me, that the beauty *he* once adored was gone. You can’t think how rapidly I faded in Italy. All my brilliancy had fled for ever before I was twenty-one. People told me it was the climate; I believed it to be the worm within gnawing at my heart; both, perhaps. Nothing could induce me to repair these ravages by the modes which I saw other women adopt; I scorned them. I was indifferent to all eyes but his, and I did not think such arts could deceive them, nor bring me back his heart. I knew I had lost that before I listened to these words of mockery, and I fancied I scarcely wanted it back again; once lost, half its value was gone. I confess that my anger was highly excited by the mockery of his countrywomen, but it turned rather on him than on them. I saw shame in his looks, and fury flashed from my eye. ‘If my beauty be gone, who has robbed me of it?’ was the reproach trembling on my lips, but I suppressed it.

In the presence of royalty I was forced to make a grateful acknowledgment of the favour shown me so tardily. There was more depth in the injuries which the old Count inflicted than appears at first sight, Catherine, you see. What I tell you is not mere trifling.'

'No, I perceive it,' replied Catherine, sadly. 'I should like to hear more of the Countess. She must have been some comfort to you.'

'Indeed, it is better worth while to speak of her, and I will tell you little more of him. As in the beginning, so it was till the end, or nearly the end. He said he saw from the first what temper I was of, and that he would break my spirit, for it wanted it, but he never did. His was not the way to do it. On the contrary, if either spirit bent, it was his. But enough of this—too much; let me speak of the Countess. Hers was an old age consecrated to devotion—a devotion teeming with superstitious observances, if you will, but sanctified by the true spirit of Christianity. My curiosity was excited as to what her earlier life had been, by the histories current of some devotees even more rigid than herself. I took pains to inform myself; I found nothing but what was good and pure. There was no mask to pull off. How much good that discovery did me. I breathed more freely, as if in a better air, from the day that I was relieved of all suspicion, and knew that I might trust her entirely, past, present, and to come. Not that there ever was any great interchange of thought and feeling between us. We could not well sympathize. She felt sorry for my youth, touched perhaps by that and by my beauty; but I was a heretic—a fact which she could not forget, I don't say forgive, for there never was a hard thought in her breast towards any breathing creature. But I do believe it was a sore trial to her that, twice in her life, her son and her grandson should have brought to her hearth strangers to her country and her faith. I think she felt for me

something which she had not felt for Ippolito's mother. At first she looked on me with a sort of wonder and fear, as on a beautiful sorceress; but at last further knowledge did convince her that, whatever were my faults of character, art was not among them. You never saw that in me, Catherine, did you?

'No, never:' replied Catherine, promptly; then stopping short, as if half fearful that she had overstepped the strict bounds of truth, she added; 'except very petty arts of coquetry.'

'Ah! I know what you mean,' said Geraldine, after musing awhile, and she sighed. She was thinking of Hugh. Presently she continued:

'Ippolito and I often pitied the dear old *Nonna* for the hard life she had imposed on herself. We used to hear her on the cold spring mornings, all through Lent, passing our door, to hasten to the earliest mass that was said. Then she would take her cup of coffee at the *caffè*, where she was well known, sitting, perhaps, beside some peasant from the country, to whom she was not known at all, and who neither suspected her rank, nor recognised her breeding. Next, she would visit some favourite sisterhood, take her gifts herself to the poor, and render a personal attendance in some of the hospitals. One day the freak seized me—I won't dignify it by any better name—to ask her to let me go with her. She looked earnestly at me, and assented. But when I was there (in the hospital, I mean), how utterly unfit I found myself for the scene into which I had plunged, unprepared by thought, by prayer, by any fixed principle of action. I raised the *portiera* for the Countess to pass, and followed her, letting it fall behind me, and oh! in what a different world had that action of a moment placed me.

'Afterwards, at the dead of night, more than once I suddenly rose up, saying to myself, 'And death—death is one step from one world into another! One step, like I took then. Oh! my God! what is there on the other side of that dark curtain?'—I shuddered.

I looked sometimes at Ippolito, and craved to know if thoughts like these ever darted through his brain. But I did not ask, I knew not how ; we had started on the horrible assumption that our religions had nothing to do with each other—that on that subject we were to have no communication—that we were bound, as it were, by honour, never to interfere with each other. Oh ! that we had rather recognised some common bond of union. What would I give now, if I could recal a time in which we had knelt side by side, and said, like two children of one parent, ‘ Our Father ! ’

The unhappy widow buried her face in silence. She resumed, after awhile :

‘ No sooner were we in the ward (the name of which had an attraction for me, for it was written up, ‘ the Ward of Sta. Agnese ’), than a hospital sister approached the Countess, greeting her with looks of genuine reverence and affection. I was immediately struck by the cheerfulness of her countenance and the cleanliness and scrupulous neatness of her attire, in which last respect she was a contrast to the dear old *Nonna*. I guessed not at the life of that serene-looking woman, healthy, comely, with the sweetest smile, the most even tone. It never occurred to me that she could abide within the constant sight and hearing of pain, often watching at the bed of death, often soothing the agonies of troubled souls, as well as the pangs of aching flesh. On the contrary, she appearing so happy—I feeling so miserable,—a sort of envy instantaneously sprang up in my heart, and a wish to do whatever she did, in order to arrive at the same result. Under this impulse I turned my eyes from the Countess and Suor Teresa Margarita, to survey the scene of the avocations which, producing so much serenity, must, I thought, be in themselves delightful. What was my horror as I glanced along the rows of little beds, each tenanted by a fellow-creature in some stage of suffering or decay ! I recoiled from the emaciation of con-

sumption, from the swollen features of disease, the inanity of old age. I uttered a sharp cry of dismay, and fell to the ground senseless. When I recovered, I was in a corridor, seated beneath an open window, Suor Teresa at my side. 'Poor child!' she said, with the gentlest pity, 'you are not used to this. It has been too much for you.'

'Then how do you bear it?' I asked, gloomily.

'How do I bear it,' she repeated, in a tone of surprise, at the same time smiling: 'of course I can bear it. I have been here twenty years; it is my vocation.'

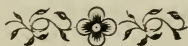
'Twenty years!' I exclaimed, in amazement; 'why then you must have come here a child?' 'How so? I am forty, now,' replied the good nun, laughing heartily, 'but every one tells me how young I look.' At that moment she saw a servant passing at the end of the corridor, and she called to her to go to the refectory, and bring certain sweetmeats that she would find there; 'they are of Suor Annunziata's making,' she said; 'none like them in Florence. You must taste them; they will do you good.' Although my companion inspired me with both surprise and interest, I felt too ill, and languid, and dreamy, to make any further inquiries. I only murmured thanks for her kindness. 'Kindness!' she exclaimed; 'as if we could do enough for any one belonging to the Countess Umiliana—our benefactress.'

'The Countess was very good to me when she rejoined us, and took me home. I ventured to say to her, 'How can you go to such a dreadful place?' She looked at me for a moment with surprise and pity, and said: 'For the love of Christ.' She did not add another word then. I can imagine how at that moment she doubted whether I had ever had any Christian training at all.

'I have lived, Catherine, to be thankful in my own person that there are persons whom the love of Christ does draw to those abodes of suffering. My careless,

heartless words come back to me, and it seems as if judgment had been tracking my steps.'

'Say correction, my dearest child,' interposed Catherine. 'Surely you can plainly perceive that a blessing has attended you—only waiting to be welcomed, to be poured out in abundant measure. Think of all your secret misgivings, the keen pangs ever recurring and forbidding you to say 'peace, peace, where there is no peace.' The accents of truth which you were ever too noble to silence, kept you in a state, if not of repentance, yet capable of becoming so. Your Heavenly Father, with chastening hand, has at last brought you where it is good for you to be. Of the 'careless daughters who sit at ease,' how many might now envy you!'





CHAPTER XII.

I'll tell thee of the long, long, dreary years
That have passed o'er me hopeless, objectless ;
My weary days, my nights of burning tears,
My wild despair, my utter loneliness,
My heartsick dreams upon my feverish bed,
My fearful longing to be with the dead.

F. A. BUTLER.

'I OFFERED no fresh solicitations to join my grandmother in her works of charity,' said Geraldine, 'and she made no attempt to induce me to do so. Whenever I was sick, she nursed me with unremitting attention. One day she sat patiently by my bed for some hours, her little *scaldino* under her feet, or sometimes in her hands, her spectacles on, reading quietly, now and then closing her book and moving her lips. I was sure that she was praying, and I felt a great wish that she should pray for me. 'She is very good,' I thought ; 'her prayers must be heard. My mother, Catherine—no doubt they pray for me still. I wonder if she does, or would ; I will ask her.' So I said, '*Nonna mia*, do you pray for me?' 'Surely, my child,' she answered, shortly and quietly. 'Why and how?' I asked, earnestly. 'Why?—because you are my child now,' said the old woman, kindly smiling on me, and patting my hand with a mother's caress. 'And how, what do you pray for me?' I asked, with redoubled interest, for I longed to ascertain how far she could discern what I stood in need of—what *she* thought I most required. She looked somewhat un-

willing to speak ; but, after a moment's hesitation, seeing that I did not withdraw my eyes from her, she replied, 'I pray that the light of truth may dawn on you, and that the holy humility which no doubt would accompany it, may be bestowed !' 'Ah ! you think, I see, that heresy must naturally make the heart proud and rebellious ?' 'I do,' she replied, quietly, and she took out her beads, as if she wished to withdraw into herself, away from me.

'But I was not satisfied yet. I raised myself on my arm, and I said—oh ! how could I !—' *Nonna mia*, I dare say it is difficult for you to pray for me ; but for Ippolito, your own child and the child of your church, you can pray for him ; surely you can pray that he may not be so very wicked !' I was full of alarm and of self-reproach the moment I had said these words. The old *Contessa* rose ; I never saw her so tall ; she drew herself up to her whole height. There was grandeur, majesty in her mien ; I had pierced her through the very heart ; but she forgave me—yes, even in that same moment she forgave ; self-conquest was rapid in her. She stood close beside me, and said, 'I do pray for him, day and night, at all hours, in all places ; my prayers weary Heaven, and at last I shall have my child.' She passed quickly out of the room, sinking down again into her usual stooping attitude and limping gait. I lay in loneliness and stupefaction for some time ; at last I turned wearily in my bed, and a book fell to the ground. It was one that the *Contessa* had laid down, and I stretched out my arm for it, because I would not have her find it on the floor. I picked it up open, and my eye glanced over the page. It was a Thomas à Kempis, and the words which caught my eye were in the chapter called *La Strada Regia della Croce*—the royal road of the Cross. What wonder that they riveted my gaze ! my heart was not dead.

'I shall never forget the avidity with which I perused that book, page after page. It was growing quite dark ; the *Contessa* came in, a lamp in her hand.

How pale she looked in the light of it, under her black hood ! She approached my bed, glanced round as if for her book, and with surprise discovered it in my hand. I held my treasure fast. '*Nonna mia*, lend me this book,' I cried. 'If you will,' she answered. Not long afterwards I said, 'Give it me.' She replied, 'Yes,' cordially ; then kissed me, and whispered, 'God bless its use to you, my daughter.'

'That prayer has been answered, not quite as she meant it, for I dare say that she hoped I should be drawn nearer to what she exclusively called truth. There was little in the book to do that, and that little was absolutely nothing to me, nor ever detained my thoughts for a moment. It was the fervent love, the heart-whole resignation which dictated the volume which made me thenceforward treasure it. I possess it still.

'I am thankful to say it was in my pocket when I fell. For *La Nonna's* sake and for its own, how dear it is to me !—dearer than anything I have, except Mary's Bible. You know, Catherine, I took that with me in my flight. I did not dare to leave it, and yet I felt almost too unworthy to take it ; but I could not leave it ; so that settled the point. I never refused myself anything then which I desired, so I did not refuse myself that. I looked at it wistfully, remorsefully, as if I hardly possessed the right to touch it, knowing well, however I justified my disobedience, what she who had used it would think of my conduct. But something whispered to me, 'You are flying from all tried friends—from all who have loved and cherished your childhood—unguarded by their blessing—into what trials, temptations, and dangers you know not. Take it with you ; you will want it.' I snatched it up, holding it fast to my bosom, and resolved never to part with it as long as I lived. When I got to Italy, and remembered all I had heard of the restrictions on the reading of the Holy Scriptures in that country, I treasured my volume more than ever, and looked on the priests who frequented the Palazzo Baldovini with aversion and

suspicion, partly founded on the belief that they would rob me of it if they could. 'But they never shall,' I said, and I met them with a haughty display of antipathy. 'They shall see that they shall never win me,' was my resolution. Of course any idea of thralldom was intolerable to me. Besides, I was not without some fixed principles; there were certain acts which I don't think any temptation would have been strong enough to induce me to commit, and thinking this, I was satisfied that, as far as religion was concerned, I was quite safe and right. It never occurred to me then that I was destitute of the spirit of religion, and not in any one way living in the discharge of, or in the attempt to discharge the solemn vows upon me; that any practical results were to come of my assent to religious truths; that the promises which sometimes lifted my heart from the depths of misery and filled it with consolation and hope, required anything on my part before I dared to appropriate them. My vanity, my pride, my impatience—I never thought of these as infringements of the law of God; but the renouncement of the church of my baptism, the commission of the crimes which I saw more than tolerated by those among whom I lived—of these acts I was as little likely to be guilty as of murder or theft. So I considered myself—not like the *Nonna*, she was a devotee—not like Mary—not like you, Catherine dear—not like any of the very good people I had ever known—but still religious—even strict in my way. I was not alarmed about myself—I did not fear to die. I was very impatient to do so; I craved for death from the day when I first knew that Ippolito loved me no longer—that he loved another—'

Geraldine stopped. She shed no tear, uttered no groan, but she needed silence ere she could speak again.

'I know the good which Thomas à Kempis did me at that time. I was utterly intolerant of suffering; my feelings were very acute, and the smarting of my

wounds was intolerable. I thought of God as my Father; I called on Him in my passionate grief; I went to Him just as a spoilt child would go to its parent—too much like I should have gone to my own mother. I cried to Him, unawed by His holiness, blind to my own sin, ‘Why am I to live to be so miserable as I am? What is life worth if I may not be happy and rejoice in it? What boon is it? Take it back; give me Heaven, for I hate earth!’

‘This was the nature of my prayers—nay, it is only truth to say that these were their very words in some of my paroxysms of agony. I never thought about training for Heaven or service to God. I felt that God was cruel to me when I found life still strong in my youthful veins, just as I had taxed my mother with cruelty when she for the first time denied my desires, and I wrapped myself up in my wretchedness, and asked, ‘Where is there any love for me?’

‘Then this book, with a friendly voice, told me that a tender father may chastise in mercy the dear child of his bosom, that Christ hath suffered for and with us, and therefore may well be trusted when He leads our steps into those thorny paths which He himself has trod, and rears the heavy Cross on the shoulder which trembles beneath it. I learned to believe that it was because God loved me that He chastised me, and those parts of Holy Writ which corroborate this doctrine gradually came out all radiant in their meaning. It was as if hitherto I had been groping in darkness, and now a ray of light struck at least here and there, and directed me onwards. Thus I began to make some progress, and to form some idea of suffering, before I framed any plan of acting religiously.’





CHAPTER XIII.

Tanto è amaro che poco è più Morte.

DANTE.

‘WHEN my grandmother was ill, I would gladly have taken my turn in nursing her, but the post I coveted was filled by another. She had one very intimate friend, of her own age, of the same habits, the same ascetic self-denial, choosing the same homely dress and food. They had a *patto* between them, these two friends, that whenever one was ill the other was to nurse her. No sooner was one confined to her chamber than the other repaired thither, and day, and night too if required, were passed in it. I dare say that the *Marchesa Anastasia* was very good, but I never could feel towards her the least as I felt towards my grandmother. In the first place she seemed to regard me with dislike and suspicion, as if she could not bear me to touch a thread belonging to her ; there was an awful severity in her whole demeanour, and she made me partly angry and partly afraid. I think *La Nonna* would have liked her to be a little softer to me, but I don’t know that she ever made any direct effort towards rendering her so. We always kept wide apart, not uncivil, vastly ceremonious ; she and Ippolito disliked each other. I fancy she reckoned his marriage with a heretic his worst deed ; I don’t think that his grandmother did. I will tell you how *Anastasia* acted at last ; it will show you the colour of her religion. One evening when the *Nonna* sat at work

at one of those curious garments which she was fond of constructing, a *bigliettino* was brought in to her which she knew must be from the *Marchesa*. She read it through. Her eyesight seemed more dim than usual; she rubbed her glasses, and read it again, and ended by putting it away in the large black reticule which she always had by her side. Though she quietly resumed her work, there was something in her very silence which awakened our curiosity. Ippolito asked if the *Marchesa* were coming? 'No, my son, she comes no more here,' she replied, in a very low, gentle tone, without desisting from her work. We looked amazed. 'What can this mean?' cried Ippolito; 'what strange caprice is this?' The *Contessa* gave him a look of mild reproof, then took out the note, and drawing the lamp a little nearer to her, read without any signs of emotion a few lines in which the *Marchesa* expressed that as she well knew her love for her was the strongest tie which held her to earth, she had resolved, not without due meditation and advice, to cut it, and to see her again no more in this world designedly—if by chance, still to avoid discourse with her, and this rigour she hoped would help to ensure their meeting in heaven. To this decision the *Contessa* resigned herself without one word of expostulation, but she felt it deeply. It was after her husband's death, and none of her early friends and companions were left her.'

'When did the old Count die?'

'About four years after my marriage—no—sooner than that. It was painful to witness his last days. His irascibility was pitiable then; it showed infirmity rather than malevolence, and I was able to bear it better, I hope, than the violence I had formerly met with in him. It was strength of mind and body yielding unwillingly to decay, but forced to crumble down into ruins. I did not see very much of him at the last. The *Contessa* was unremitting in her nursing, and I tried to induce her to let me spare her some of

it, but found the attempt almost ineffectual ; she would sometimes let me stay near him while she went to church. He had one or two old friends who came to see him frequently, and were kind and considerate ; and though he was a man who made himself feared and hated while in health, some of those who had shunned him then, charitably sought him now. He rebelled against old age and death ; I never saw any one do so more. I remember how angry I made him, quite unintentionally, when first I came to live in the *palazzo*. I observed, not with impertinence, quite accidentally, that he did not fast one day which the others were observing strictly ; he fell into a fury, and Ippolito said to me afterwards, ‘Don’t you know my father’s age exempts him from these things, but he can’t endure that any one should remark that he possessed such a privilege.’ ‘And *La Nonna*, then,’ I asked, ‘surely she too might enjoy it ?’ ‘She might, I dare say, but I don’t think she ever will. I don’t believe she will feast on this side the tomb ; her feast will be in Paradise.’ Ippolito really loved and venerated her. ‘There will be a saint in the family a hundred years hence,’ he used to say, alluding to the time which must elapse before any one can be canonized. He did indeed owe her love and gratitude. After her husband’s death she never exacted any of her rights, which, owing to the distinction of the family, and its much greater wealth at the time of the making of her marriage settlements, were such as could not have been rendered by her grandson without considerable inconvenience and impoverishment. And impoverished enough we already were, and poorer did we grow every day. *La Nonna* took nothing from us but what was absolutely necessary for her, except the sums which she was accustomed to dispose of for the relief of the poor. I sighed to see her deny herself the little comforts that would have suited her age, and to think that all the sweepings of the house but too often went to the gaming-table. But she, I knew,

cherished a still deeper regret, that there were not more masses said for the souls of her husband and her son.'

'That son—did you hear anything of his character?'

'I believe that he was a mild, harmless man, whom his father rendered miserable, and whom, I should think, his wife could not have made happy. His virtues, like his mother's, were of a passive rather than of an active character. I have heard the *Contessa* say that patience was the first thing and the last thing, and the intermediate thing: and this she practised herself, and thus I believe she taught him. His sole act of rebellion was his marriage, and I suppose that was effected by the craft and boldness of *La Marianna*, without any great daring or exertion being called for from him.

'The *Contessa* Umiliana was enduring indeed; sometimes I even thought that her extreme patience aggravated my impatience. I could not endure to see her bear and forbear—it irritated me. I became much more perverse and ungovernable in temper at Florence than I had been at Lascelles—you think that scarcely possible—but it was so, I assure you, Catherine. The flattery, the idolatry, on which I feasted the first year of my marriage, must have made me blinder, weaker, prouder than ever. There was not a fault in which I indulged that Ippolito did not admire and encourage. My impatience, my *insolenza*, as he called it, amused him; my perverseness, the caprice which rendered it impossible for him to know what to expect beforehand, was a pleasant stimulus to his indolence. Thus made his plaything, think what I felt when the change came over him! 'Vexed as a thing that is raw,' yes, that was my daily, hourly feeling—previous to the agonies that came after, when I knew what it almost maddened me to know.

'From *that* fatal period I suppose my whole conduct was as injudicious as it could possibly be. I don't imagine that those most bent on destroying my

domestic happiness could have laid down a plan for me to pursue, better fitted in every point to aid their design than the one which I devised for myself. The deeper I sounded his falseness and his folly the more contempt and anger I displayed ; the second he might have forgiven, the first, never ; but I felt both and could conceal neither. Strange, that with all my passionate love for him, I thought only of the wound *I* had received and believed unhealable. I said the hand that made, neither could nor should close it. I thought not of him as *La Nonna* thought—as of a sinner to be reclaimed—I wearied not Heaven with prayers like hers ! I did indeed at times talk with my proud heart about crushing inward its wounded feelings, and affecting indifference if it could not feel it. But I was no adept at concealment. I never could control myself ; never repress anything long, though I had made repeated resolutions so to do. I believe that often when I fancied that I had wrapped myself up securely in the coldest reserve, the most determined silence, those around me knew better what I thought and felt than I did myself.

‘Then my wars with the old Count did not improve my temper. I verily believe that half the misery and sin of our lives was owing to idleness. The irksomeness, the wearisomeness of my existence I can scarcely describe to you. I soon grew heartily tired of attending the theatres, and every entertainment I ceased to enjoy when I saw others triumphing in having won my husband from me, and made him one of themselves. The women of Italy never received me as a countrywoman. They found my presence a restraint. They hated me for my pride. They tried to convince Ippolito that I never could inspire any deep love, and that in fact he never had really loved me, an assertion he could not believe.

‘Even against my singing they formed a cabal, and endeavoured to pronounce that I could not sing ; but he did not credit that either, though my voice had lost

its charm for his ear. After I reached Italy, music and painting acquired a fascination for me which they had not before possessed. At first I cultivated them with him, but Ippolito soon lost all relish for such occupations, though his talents were not inconsiderable. More exciting pursuits led him away; racing was, for a season, his passion. There was no one honourable avocation open to him; nothing that he could do or aim at worthy to fill up time and awaken a high-toned ambition. Poor Ippolito! how many excuses can I frame for him now, which, earlier considered, might have rendered me more conciliating. I wish I had pitied him then as I do now!

‘For myself, in my loneliness, my dulness, I sometimes thought that what would best amuse me would be to attract to our house a few of the cleverest professors of art; but this was wholly forbidden by the *Conte Giustiniano*, either through pride or, perhaps, shame at the scantiness of the patronage which we had to bestow. Whatever were his motives, every restriction he placed I chose to regard as a further act of tyranny. But how could such pursuits, soothing, absorbing as I sometimes found them, have filled up the deep requirements of my heart?’





CHAPTER XIV.

Thou shalt be led back to thine early days
Of life and love.
I'll come to thee with the bright sunny brow,
That was Hope's throne before I met with thee ;
And then I'll show thee how 'tis furrowed now
By the untimely age of misery.

F. A. BUTLER.

‘ I HAVE told you enough—more than enough—of my Italian life. Why have I lingered so long on these details? I must answer for myself, Catherine. Because I have not dared to come nearer home, as I must.

‘ You know how long a period my mother suffered to elapse before she wrote to me a second time. I did not understand her motives then ; you have explained them. This one advantage I derived from her silence. If I had written to her in my joyous days, my letters would have been *riantes* and triumphant—for at first everything bore me out in the belief that I had known how to choose happiness for myself, and then, when the cloud came, how could I have concealed the shadow which it cast? She must have perceived the sudden chill that came over me. But, as our correspondence did not begin till afterwards, there was no such striking change for her to remark. In the deliberate act of writing, I could, in some degree, control my feelings, and, at least, if I gave her reason to suspect that I was less happy than

I had anticipated, I could disguise from her how miserable I was. So it went on. Her letters were the solitary treasure of my life, I won't say joy—for not one did I ever receive which did not inflict a keen pang of agony. Not the least precious part of them, dear Catherine, were the brief lines you sometimes added. Indeed, when they were missing I was ever dissatisfied; for though my mother omitted not to speak of her health, I felt certain that she kept back half the truth from me, and on your reports alone did I dare rely.

‘You know she spoke of a winter in Italy. My heart (as surely she and you must have expected) leapt with transport at the first thought of a meeting. Oh! Catherine, imagine the anguish of feeling this first natural emotion fast subsiding, and of recognising that I did not, could not really wish her here! No—I could ill endure that by your coming you should both of you detect, as I knew you would, all I had concealed. It was not our poverty—if we had been only poor, how could I have triumphed in exclaiming:

‘‘See, in having Ippolito I have all!’’

‘But for you to see that I had lost him for whom I gave all! You know that I spoke of the scorching sun and the keen winds of Florence—ah! did I not chill your hearts? Of Naples—of Malta—of Paris, I could better bear to hear. I communicated the idea of the latter to Ippolito, and greatly resented the coldness with which he listened. The time proposed was still distant. Although he raised many objections, he did not give any distinct denial, and I chose to assume that the request was acceded to. The question, however, never came to an issue.

‘And now arrives the period every incident of which is written on my brain as if in letters of fire. We were in the beautiful days of September, and each evening I went to the *Cascine*. Sometimes Ippolito himself drove me there, for he still loved his horses. The evening I speak of he accompanied me, and I requested

him to pass first by the *Piazza del Gran Duca*, that I might ask at the post if there were any letters for me. I had been anxiously expecting to hear from my mother all the week, and had been too much absorbed in my own feelings to observe Ippolito much. His grandmother thought him gloomy and abstracted; if so, probably some loss at cards was the reason of it, and how could I concern myself for anxieties such as his? We drove to the *Piazza*—there was a letter. I tore it open and began to read it with avidity. It was not from my mother, but Lady Rivers; it told me how much worse *she* had rapidly grown—all chance of recovery was over. This was not all, Catherine! Oh! that woman's bad heart!

'She acknowledged that I could not need a fuller forgiveness than I had again and again received; but she dared to go on to say she was convinced that my letters had never given my mother complete satisfaction, and that she could not justify it to herself not to admonish me—call me solemnly to repentance, when an event was close at hand which I must be conscious I had hastened, if not occasioned! There was more in this strain!'

'God forgive her!' exclaimed Catherine.

'As I read it, it pierced through my heart and brain like a sword. I know not what I did or said. I remember I caught Ippolito's arm—his horses were always fiery—I believe I nearly occasioned some serious accident. I know there was an outcry and a crowd round us, and I know no more till I found myself on my own bed, the *Contessa* by me; Ippolito with my letter in his hand.

'Agitated and alarmed, he had not been able to make out the sense accurately, and his first words were, 'Is she dead, Giralda?' in a tone of anguish.

'No, no, no!' I replied, vehemently; 'she cannot—she must not die till I have seen her. I must start instantly—instantly for England—you must take me there, Ippolito—will you not?' The last interrogation

was caused by the sudden change in his countenance—a recoil from my proposal, which I too plainly perceived. ‘I will go,’ I said, rising and tottering. He put his hand on me, and made me sit down on the bed again. ‘It has cost me enough to have brought you back here,’ he said, bitterly. ‘It was as much as my life is worth not to have been seen at the *Cascade* this evening.’ This sounded to me like some *stravaganza*, either without meaning, or with one which was a new insult to me—and at such a moment! But precisely because it was such a moment I hardly heeded it *then*. ‘I must go to Leghorn, and to England, without the slightest loss of time,’ I exclaimed. Ippolito, who was pacing up and down the chamber, stopped short and cried fiercely: ‘*Ed i mezzi, dove sono?*’—Where are the means? ‘You will not dare to refuse them to me for this,’ I said, trembling. ‘If I have them not?’ he asked, passionately. I threw myself on my knees. ‘Oh! Ippolito, have mercy upon me! Give me of your stores for the gaming-table—or, if those be exhausted, where are the diamonds with which you loaded me yesterday, and dragged me to Court like a victim crowned for sacrifice?—give me some of those precious stones, which seemed to crush my brain last night—give them now, and pour balm into my heart—give them to me, and I will bless you, and love you again as if you had never caused me a pang.’ I caught his hand, pressed it to my lips, and raised my face to him with a smile of thanks on it, for I would not be refused. But he looked down on me with pity: ‘Poor, silly child!’ he said; ‘don’t you know that the jewels of which you speak are heirlooms?—that it is not in my power to touch one of them for your needs or mine? They are in Antonio’s keeping, and were you to supplicate him instead of me, he could only deny you.’

‘I gazed incredulously on him—dull with despair.

‘“Don’t you believe me?” he cried, impatiently; ‘you shall hear. Antonio! Antonio—’ The old man hastened to us.

‘I had risen from my knees. I was standing speechless beside Ippolito. ‘Come here; your young *Padrona* will not credit that with those beautiful diamonds which you doled out to her last night, I can still be poor. She reproaches me that I will not change them for gold, to take her to England. I tell her she must ask them of you—not of me!’

‘Antonio looked bewildered—stammered:—‘Gold, to go to England! little gold enough is there to keep the house here; why should she go to England, *la Padroncina*?’ ‘Why!’ I cried, darting towards him; ‘because my mother is dying. Antonio, you have always been good to me.’ ‘Good?’ said the old man, shaking his head, ‘good for nothing; old, worn-out, brokenhearted; I can’t give you the diamonds—no, no—Antonio betray his trust!’ He paused, as if for brief consideration: ‘but I can serve you, my poor child, and I will.’ He hastened out of the room. In a few minutes he returned with a canvas bag in his hand. He patted it with exultation, crying, ‘Here is gold—gold in abundance; this is mine—I give it you. Go, my child—go.’

‘I thought that Ippolito eyed the treasure with the eye of a gambler, scarcely able to resist seizing it for himself; and I caught it desperately, ran to the *Contessa*’s side, and said, ‘Am I right? *Nonna, cara Nonna*, am I right? May I take it? My friends are rich; they will repay it all, threefold, I am sure; it is but borrowing it. Dear, good Antonio—’ and I clung to the old man’s knees, shedding floods of tears. The *Contessa* wiped her eyes, and said, ‘Take it, Giralda; God will repay Antonio.’ Here was one great obstacle removed. The *Contessa* began to enter into the preparations for my departure with zealous kindness. It hardly seemed to occur to us whether Ippolito was to accompany me or not; I believe that his grandmother took it for granted that he would, while I thought not at all about the question. Presently something made it appear that he did not mean to go further than

Leghorn. *La Nonna* put her hand gently on his arm: 'She is very young—very inexperienced in trouble; will you not be with her?' 'No, no,' replied Ippolito, much disturbed; 'I cannot; you know not what you ask. You think it right; it is wrong. I must not. I will take her to Leghorn. The vessel has an English captain, she will be safe; and you, Antonio, remember, if any one inquire for me, say that as I live, I shall be in Florence before sunset the day after to-morrow.' He looked pale, perplexed, and wretched; a feeling of something like tenderness revived in my heart, but I was impatient to be gone.

'We started at daybreak, Ippolito and I; the *Contessa* was going to mass. We did not trust ourselves with a long leave-taking, but as she pressed me to her heart, I whispered: 'Pray for me, poor miserable creature that I am—pray for me, you who are good and holy; and oh! ask that I may see my mother again!' Ippolito was gloomy—abstracted; I could not read his mood. When he spoke, he said: 'Giralda, you have been unhappy here. When first I knew you, I never thought of that. Yet it could not be otherwise. Nothing here suits you; our manners, our ideas—all is different.' 'I cared not what was different, while *you* were the same,' I replied, in a choked voice. He did not seem to heed my words, but he looked so wild that I was frightened; I took his hand. 'Ippolito,' I asked, 'what is this?' 'I wished to say to you, Giralda, your friends will find out that you love not your home here; they will desire to keep you, perhaps; perhaps it will be well for you to stay, *chi sa?* You shall hear of or from me, soon.' We settled how we were to interchange letters; and he grew more like himself.

'There was nothing he could do for me that day that he did not, and his manner was so kind! My heart was melted; then the time for parting came. We were alone in the cabin; he took me in his arms, and said: '*Addio*, Giralda, who knows whether we may meet again? happier for you had we never met!'

‘No, no,’ I sobbed, scarce knowing what I said; ‘forgive me, Ippolito. I have not been patient.’ ‘Forgive *you*, *povera* ? I have little to forgive, and it is all forgiven; you have much; can you say as I do?’

‘I could not. There was a choking in my throat—a swelling at my heart. I could not say, ‘I forgive,’ but I said, ‘I will try.’ ‘That is enough,’ he replied, quickly—‘I go;’ once more he kissed me, almost as in past days, and he was gone.

‘That was our parting, Catherine.’





CHAPTER XV.

That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore.

WORDSWORTH.

GERALDINE hastened on :
' I reached England—I reached London—Ippolito had given me a direction where to lodge. I drove to the street which he had told me of, and thence engaged a hackney coach to take me to ——— Square. The moment that we turned the corner, I pulled the check-string—I put out my head—I saw that the blinds were not down—I shrank back—my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. 'Go—ring—find out who is in that house,' I contrived to utter. The man obeyed; a servant in mourning came. I beckoned him to me—my head swam. I clung to the door of the coach,—'Tell me when?' I gasped. 'The funeral took place at Lascelles on the 19th,' he said. 'Catherine,' I gasped, pointing to the door; 'Mrs. Irving is gone to Brighton—Lady Rivers—' I shrank back with horror. As soon as I escaped from him, I said, 'I must go to Lascelles.' I made the driver understand—I overcame his difficulties—soon I was on the road to my home! As I approached it, the very hedgerows were familiar; my impatience was uncontrollable. I felt certain that I could far outstrip my conveyance—I insisted on being put down. I told the driver to wait for me at the little inn you know of,—the money I thrust into his hand gained compliance. I think I showed wonderful

presence of mind that day; not a thing did I forget or omit. Oh! my poor over-wrought brain—it paid dear for this; I did not shed a tear all along that road. My mother's grave—I wanted to weep there. I reached the churchyard; I knew the part where she must be; there was a new-lain grave. I knew it was that, by Mary! I went and knelt down. I was not insensible, but still I don't know anything as to how long I was there; and the tears I had so long waited for, came not even then. I heard a child's voice saying, 'Mammy, there is a lady saying her prayers on the new grave.' I got up, and took the path which leads into our shrubbery; I walked very fast till I found myself at the drawing-room window, and looking in, I saw poor Agnes!

'Did you?' exclaimed Catherine; 'then it was no delusion—and I would not believe her.'

'What! she recognised me, did she? The sight of her inspired me with the dread of encountering Lady Rivers, and I turned away in haste, made my escape to the inn, returned to London—reached my lodgings about midnight, and fainted as I got out of the coach. The woman carried me to bed. Next morning I saw a letter lying on my pillow; it was from Florence—but I did not open it—and Ippolito seemed to me then only like one who had come between me and my mother. At last I broke the seal; it was not his hand, I saw. It was some time before I understood it; and it was of no use to call any one to read it to me, because it was in Italian. *La Nonna's* confessor wrote it. At last I knew that Ippolito was dead—murdered in a duel—brought home to his grandmother—and oh! Catherine, her prayers were granted; she heard him pray to his God and to her for forgiveness. She heard him say that he feared I could not forgive! Oh! horror, oh! remorse! I knew that while this was passing, I was only trying to forgive, and I cried to myself: 'Oh! my poor Ippolito! I who once thought no love might compare with the love I bore thee, have

I been hardest of all with thee!' How I longed to make time roll back, and space yield to me, and to be at his dying side, to let none touch him but I; and to say 'I don't *forgive*,—*I love*,' but it was all too late now.

'I suppose I shall never remember much about that day. I grew very restless and distracted. I think that which made me get up and wander out, no one knowing of it, was something very trivial compared to the awful realities—some fancy about my mourning which tormented me. I thought no one ever would or could understand what it was that I wanted—whether for an orphan or for a widow.

'I can tell you nothing till I became conscious that I was in an hospital, the nurse saying that I had been brought in with a fractured limb, and that a brain fever had ensued. I heard with anguish that I was not dying, and now I have learnt to rejoice that my days have been prolonged. I have done now, Catherine—I have no more to tell.'





CHAPTER XVI.

If among lost mankind love is thus sweet—
If here below, though Absence intervene
And Distance spread her envious arms between,
'Tis so unspeakable that Time's dull feet
To a melodious chime do seem to beat;
And while we love each other, though unseen,
We seem to walk as if our feet had been
Bathed in warm glowing sunshine—
Then what must be the substance which remains,
Whose semblance here and shadow is so dear !

Thoughts in Past Years.

THE first cold winds of spring forced Gwen and her mother to repair to London, where Geraldine received them with frank and lively joy; not that the sight of their suffering faces caused no sadness, nor that the renewed daily observation of their devoted affection excited no remorse. Nevertheless, her welcome was such as gladdened their hearts.

As to health, small progress had been made on either side, and small had been the anticipation of it. Mrs. Owen might better be called 'the prisoner of hope' than Geraldine, for her release was evidently close at hand. The other, crippled as at the first, saw no present peril to her life from her sufferings. Still death and life were to each acceptable boons—each felt that her necessities were met by a merciful Providence.

Since Geraldine had become, as it were, the adopted

daughter of Mrs. Owen, the sister of Gwen, she had not ventured to speak of Hugh, until the spell of silence was broken by their tongues. She then showed a lively interest in all relating to him, and took with grateful delight some of his letters which Gwen lent her to read. In one of them occurred the mention of her own name : ' Always let me know everything you hear of poor Geraldine ! '

' Dear Hugh ! could he care to hear ? ' ' Poor Geraldine ! ' Poor indeed in worth—in everything, except in the love and compassion of some true Christian hearts, and there, how undeservedly rich ! ' Dear Gwen,' presently added Geraldine, ' when you send a letter to Hugh, may I put one line with my own hand ? And you—you may tell *him* everything.'

' Will you write ? ' cried Gwen. ' Certainly you may.'

Soon after returning from Hastings, Gwen placed a sheet of paper before Geraldine, and reminded her of her request ; but Geraldine pushed it from her, covered her eyes with her hand, and said :

' I cannot.'

Gwen waited a few moments in silence, and then was about to withdraw ; but Geraldine, hearing her move, started, and cried :

' Wait, Gwen, wait. I will do as I said I would.' She snatched the pen hurriedly, and wrote :

' Dear Hugh,—Gwen is an angel to me—'

She threw down the pen and burst into tears, pointing to the words with her finger.

' No, no, not that,' said Gwen, in tones of distress.

' Why not ? ' replied Geraldine. ' What is an angel ? —God's messenger of good tidings. It must go.'

At Hastings Mrs. Owen had received her son's farewell letter.

' Here, my child,' she said, extending it to Gwen, when she had finished reading it, ' is the last thing I was looking for, and with it I would humbly hope my earthly cares cease.'

Gwen read it in unbroken silence. The first part of the letter was the outpouring, for the last time on earth, of a heart in which filial affection had been strengthened by intercourse, such as parents and children rarely enjoy. Mrs. Owen had been to her son father and mother in one, peculiarly dear and precious by the force of character as well as of circumstance. Hugh was of a more timid disposition than Gwen; there had been much to try him in his father's demeanour—much that would have proved hurtful had it not been tempered by his mother's sympathy, and ready comprehension of his feelings. His father did not yield him the companionship nor the encouragement that he needed; in his presence he felt dread and constraint. Mr. Owen, who, under an abstracted and rigid deportment, cherished an intense affection for his wife and children, was quite unconscious of the chill he spread around him. Happily there was a period of sunshine at the close of his days when the mild beams of faith and of hope pierced through the darkened atmosphere which had enveloped him—when he yielded full, even cheerful acquiescence to God's decree, that he should rise and depart, and trusted his precious ones, without molesting doubts and fears, to Him who careth for the widow and the orphan. Hugh gained unspeakably by this happy change, which gave him a father to remember as the object of that love which casts out fear. He scarcely permitted himself to scrutinize the difference of the feelings with which he had regarded his mother, while recognising that the tide of tenderness and gratitude towards her had never met an impediment; throughout life the free communion of their spirits had known no bar but that of absence. This gave the touching tone to his present leave-taking. The parent he venerated was going before him to that home in which, once gained, each looked to enjoy a more blissful intercourse than on earth they could attain to. With many a natural sigh and tear at the present necessity for parting, and deep, heart-felt

yearning for the time of reunion, Hugh was as one who lingers on the shore to watch the last glimpse of the vessel which bears his dearest to the haven where they would be, and wishing not to recal, comforts himself with the prospect of following them. Meanwhile he may not tarry nor gaze too long; he has his work to complete—that work which stands between him and readiness to depart. Thus Hugh turned back in thought and deed to his labour, and speaking of it he assumed a firmer tone. He asked his mother's prayers for its advancement. 'It is the work of Christ,' he said; 'and whatever fault there be, it is in the instruments.' He wrote with the zeal and piety of a Martyn. The last part of his letter applied to his sister. 'How gladly would I have been at her side to gather up your last words—to receive your latest blessing—to support and comfort her by taking her to the only human heart which throbs with the same memories of the past, and the same hope for the future. But were other obstacles removed, the evil resulting from the withdrawal of my presence, and the cessation of my labour in a place insufficiently supplied either with overseers or labourers, is so evident and incalculable that I know both you and she would forbid it as unequivocally as my own conscience does. But, dearest mother, when Gwen is alone will she not come to me?—to be the delight and solace of my life—my fellow-worker in a vineyard overgrown with weeds and brambles, many of which her hand could well assist to remove. When I reflect on her energy, her strong practical sense, her unwearied devotion to all she loves, I feel convinced that she would be happy here, in spite of difficulties, privations, repeated thwartings, repeated deceptions. The human soul has a value and an interest belonging to it, that must ever make us willing to count even by units, in our attempts to liberate it. If I can only keep my ground here, there is hope for the future. In circumstances such as mine, not to fall back has something of progress in it.'

Gwen read to the end without a pause ; then the hand which held it sank gradually into her lap, scarcely retaining it in its grasp.

‘My child—Gwen,’ said Mrs. Owen.

‘Yes, mother.’

‘Are you ill?’

‘No.’

Gwen raised herself ; she was very pale, and her eyes had their strange peculiar glow.

‘Tell me, have you ever thought of this for yourself?’

‘Yes, mother, I have.’

‘In what manner?’

‘As that which I should best like to do—the sole thing I could like then.’

Mrs. Owen gently took her hand. Her daughter felt the pulses gradually beat less quick under the restraining, calming influence of that touch. Her mother spoke :

‘You have my consent and my blessing on the undertaking, my child ; your present office of love and duty has its end in view, and it is unspeakably delightful to me to think of my children as together, and thus employed ; if it should please God to let things run in this course, but if it please him not, may we be well satisfied to do his pleasure !’

‘Amen,’ said Gwen. And she felt, though she could not tell why, that with these words went forth a decree against the accomplishment of her wish.

‘My Gwen,’ exclaimed Mrs. Owen, with a sudden emotion, ‘the comfort, the blessing you have been to me ! How can I doubt the increase of happiness it would be to him to have you !’

‘Mother,’ interrupted Gwen, in a low voice, ‘say anything but this—I can’t bear this.’

‘Yes,’ said her mother, with uncontrollable fervour, ‘yes, you must like to feel what you are to us.’

‘I like to feel,’ replied Gwen, pressing closer to her, ‘I like to thank God for the inestimable privilege of

having called you mother, of having lived and watched at your side, of having been the object of your care, and of your prayers. I like to think that I shall have your blessing abiding with me when my eyes behold you no more!

Gwen hid her face on her mother's bosom.

The day for writing to Hugh arrived. Gwen, for the first time, transmitted an exact relation of Geraldine's sad history.

'I fear this will be exquisitely painful to him,' said Mrs. Owen; 'I don't think that his love for her ever passed away like a boy's fancy.'

'No,' replied Gwen, 'for it was not a boy's fancy. How much deeper he looked than I did. He saw and deplored the waste and injury of a really noble character. He discerned what I was blind to—wilfully blind, I think now, I must have been. Her sufferings will touch him to the quick—I know that; but he will perceive the gradual brightening of her excellence; he will feel a hope and joy concerning her such as he can never yet have felt, and he will be the happier. You know, mother, that she wishes him to be told.'

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Owen; 'nor did I speak with the intention of altering your purpose. I believe all you say. I am sure that it is best for him to know all that we know about this dear child.'

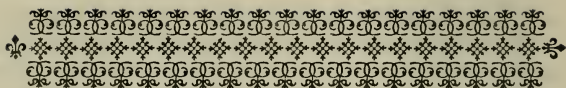
'Mother, I like to hear you call her that; surely there is something very childlike about her now. But apart from her request, I have resolved to have no withholdings from Hugh that I can possibly avoid. I can never forget the misery and the mischief attending my long system of reserve with you, dearest mother. Am I not right?'

'Yes, Gwen, you are right.'

Gwen finished her letter as she had begun it, and Mrs. Owen was able to add a few lines to it—the feeble tracings of her own hand, which Hugh could not have expected to see again. She spoke of his proposal

with regard to Gwen as having her full approbation ;
'but this we must leave in the hands of Providence,
and to her own decision, when the time for decision
comes.'





CHAPTER XVII.

All faults I make, when I shall come to know them,
I do repent.'

SHAKESPEARE.

'THIS is too dreadful,' exclaimed Geraldine, bursting into tears. 'I cannot bear it.'

'What, my dearest Miss Geraldine?' tenderly inquired Catherine, who often relapsed into that old appellation.

'Why, I see plainly that not one but all of you think me quite wrong—so wrong that you cannot even believe in my deep repentance as long as—' again she paused, and again Catherine urged an explanation.

'As long as I persist in not appealing to Mr. Faulkner for forgiveness.'

'We can, we do think you alive to the faults of the past, but not equally so to the duties of the present—at least in this particular instance; but we are not impatient with you. You have no cause to think that. How have we shown it?'

'You don't show it—that is what tortures me. You are all waiting, expecting me to do at some future time, what if ever done, there is no reason to delay.'

'Certainly, none, if you are ready and willing to do it; we will not quarrel about the sooner or the later,' replied Catherine.

'If I appear before him as a suppliant, he will never

believe that I am repentant ; he will think I need and seek a renewal of his bounty.'

'Oh ! no ; he is not suspicious.'

'Lady Rivers is. I must find out some mode which shall not cast a doubt on the singleness of my motive. Let me consider for myself.'

'Very well,' said Catherine, 'that is just what I most wish you to do. Take as long as you like for reflection. It is of much more consequence what you do than whether you do it to-day or to-morrow.'

'One word more, Catherine. He positively forbid you ever to mention me to him ?'

'He did, but I made no promise.'

'Still I can't think that you are in a position to disobey him.'

'Not lightly, certainly,' replied Catherine.

'I am sure that you shall not, for my sake, run the risk of offending him. I have done harm enough to every one who has come near me.'

Left to herself Geraldine was not long in acting, we shall not say deciding, for her mind started from one opinion and resolution to another the most opposite, during her brief period of reflection ; it was this indecision in thought which made her prompt in action. She threw the die with a tremulous hand, and wrote the following words in uncertain characters :—

'SIR,—I cannot have any peace with my God until I have made all possible acknowledgment of my past offences. I am afraid the very sight of this letter will stir up your wrath afresh, but I pray Heaven to give you patience to cast your eye over it, and to dispose you to accord your pardon to my hearty repentance. Very rebellious and ungrateful has my past conduct been towards you, and it was not till God smote me sorely that I recognised my sin. Him for whom I left you I have lost. I am a widow as well as an orphan. I do not dare to dwell longer on my misery. If you can forgive me for the past, and for thus addressing you, will you write one line to comfort my heart, and en-

close it to the Rev. S. Vere, ———, who can send it to me.’

GERALDINE DE BALDOVINI.

Geraldine folded and sealed this letter rapidly, and it was lying by her side when Catherine returned.

‘Now, Catherine, will you assure me that you will put this in the post, and if no answer come to it, that you will never mention my name to Mr. Faulkner, unless he first mention it to you? Unless you promise as much as this, my letter shall not go.’

‘Oh! Miss Geraldine, you must trust me without promises. I cannot make them. I don’t know what God’s providence may have in store, and it always seems to me like walking wilfully blindfold to tie oneself with promises about the future.’

‘But, you really have no right to reveal my secrets to Mr. Faulkner.’

‘Well, I hope that what I have no right to do I shall abstain from doing, whether I promise or not.’

Geraldine was forced to be satisfied with this, and in fact she was, perhaps more than if she had obtained what she asked for; and the letter was certainly put in the post by Catherine herself, but days and weeks passed, and no answer arrived. At last, all agreed to look for one no more, to speak of hope or fear no more, to form, at least to utter, no new conjectures as to its fate.

We all know how, in our great metropolis, individuals may dwell near each other, and even desire the sight of each other, and yet rarely if ever come to so much as an accidental, unpremeditated meeting. Thus it was with regard to Catherine and Mr. Faulkner. He was aware of her return to England; she had received the first remittance of her annuity, she had ventured to call at his house, but had not seen him, and he was averse to seek or invite her presence in any direct mode. Almost involuntarily Catherine would sometimes turn out of her road into one which seemed very likely to cross his habitual paths, and still for a long while they met not. One

day, however, they stood face to face, and each started back with mutual recognition. It was some weeks after the despatch of Geraldine's ill-fated letter. Catherine thought, at the first glance, that her master looked darker and sterner than when last she saw him; was it only that the sight of her called gloom to his countenance? Very few words were exchanged between them:

'Catherine Irving—you here? I thought you were at Brighton, probably.'

'No, sir—' 'Shall I say my duty lies here?' asked Catherine, of herself, but she only added, 'at Mrs. Owen's, sir.'

'And how is she?'

'Not long for *here*, sir.'

'Poor thing. Her daughter with her, of course?'

'Oh! yes, sir.'

Mr. Faulkner passed on. Catherine asked herself if it were possible that they had met and parted, and that this was all? She could not say what she had hoped, still less what she had expected, but she turned homewards in a blanker mood than she had ever experienced before.

To Geraldine she would not mention this meeting; she did to Gwen; neither offered a comment, both felt hopeless. Not many days, however, elapsed before Catherine received a letter from Mr. Faulkner, enclosing a draft for 50*l.* for Miss Owen's use. Gwen could not refuse it, accompanied as it was by expressions of sympathy and respect, but she felt more than ever disinclined to intercede for the apparently rejected Geraldine, more than ever resolved to struggle to supply her every want, and the affection, the care bestowed on the unfortunate young widow, if possible, by every one around her, from that time, exceeded their former measure.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Like one
Who having unto truth, by telling of it,
Made such a sinner of his memory
To credit his own lie.

SHAKESPEARE.

HAD Mr. Faulkner thus silently discarded for ever Diane's daughter, Mary's sister, the orphan, the widow? Was such asperity in his nature? in human nature? What would her pardon have cost him? The extinction of wrath, the crushing of pride. And was he, the strong man, unequal to grapple with such mighty foes? We know not; but there was a meaner spirit near him who could not renounce self-interest, neither for the love of God above, nor of suffering humanity on earth.

'My dear Augustus,' said Lady Rivers, holding in her hand two packets of letters, one for Mr. Faulkner, one for herself; 'the post is in, but you are as unfit to attend to business as you can possibly be. Now do leave your papers alone till after Dr. X. has made his visit.'

Mr. Faulkner, in contradiction to his usually phlegmatic deportment, when ill and confined to his bed, as at present, was irritable in no slight degree. He never permitted contradiction; well, he silenced it briefly, and without in the least ruffling his own composure; sick, every tone and gesture evinced impatience. Now tossing restlessly on his pillow, he replied:

'Pshaw—give me my letters at once. Or stop, you

may, if you will, open and read them to me. My giddiness is not gone yet, certainly—but I can listen very well.'

As Lady Rivers passed the letters a second time through her hands, the writing of one of the addresses caught her attention, and made her stop short, with a start. Her first feeling was the hope that her brother had not seen this passing agitation, and a rapid glance toward the bed showed her that she was standing where the curtain hid her from his view.

'How fortunate—quite providential!' exclaimed Lady Rivers, inwardly, and she conveyed the alarming document from among her brother's letters into the midst of her own packet, and very deliberately committed them to her pocket. 'There is a letter from Jemima which I am longing to read, but you shall have yours first. I am always happy to be of use to you, you know, Augustus.'

After the utterance of this becoming sentiment, she seated herself, and read through several communications on business, which at another time she would have striven to comprehend, but which now could not fix the smallest portion of her attention, and immense was her relief when her brother bid her throw one after another of them aside for his clerk, who soon made his appearance, and took her post beside his master's bed.

Alas! poor Geraldine! how much more faithfully, how much more mercifully would your letter have been dealt with, had it come to the hands of honest Scott than to those of the very rigid, very conscientious Lady Rivers, always choking at the sight of a neighbour swallowing a gnat, and digesting camels herself without appearing to feel any uncomfortable effects from such weighty morsels.

The moment that Lady Rivers was released, she hastened to her own room, and standing by the fire, took out her store of letters. There were one or two indifferent ones; those were soon disposed of. Then

came Jemima's; over this, the mother's face grew grave.

'I certainly should not be sorry if she could spare me these repeated applications to her uncle for money; C— must be very extravagant, I declare. Jemima is an excellent wife, no doubt. How could she be otherwise, brought up as she was? But really she ought to consider my feelings also—this will make difficulties for us, some day, generous as Augustus is; at least, it would if I had not a great deal of discretion. And now that tormenting letter—I can't bear the sight of it, nor endure to touch it. What am I to do with it? Certainly not give it to Augustus in his present state. That would be most unjustifiable. I am not disposed to endanger his health to serve any purpose Madame Baldovini may have in view. I believe that I ought to open it and look at her address, and return it, with a warning of the uselessness of these missives. Good heavens! there is nothing but a London post-mark on it; what can that mean? Is she come at last? may she be here at any hour? She is bold enough to make any attempt, that I know very well. I must really place myself on my guard. My brother is not in a state which can be trifled with. I think she may be contented with having destroyed her poor mother, as I shall always say she did. Without causing him a fit of apoplexy, perhaps—for Augustus is terribly passionate when he is excited, and though Dr. X. says this is a mere bilious attack, I am not so sure of that—I shall open this letter immediately. Augustus told me to open his letters.'

And courageously disregarding a certain twinge which she felt at the moment when she first introduced her finger and thumb between the seal and the paper, she tore open Geraldine's letter.

'A widow!' she at length exclaimed. 'A widow and an orphan—and sorely smitten—yes! so God deals with undutiful children. Well, I am sure I hope it

does make her think of the past. What an example ! sad, indeed, and so young as she is !

She returned to the letter: 'Not a clue, I see, to where she is, or what she expects; little enough, I should think, if she really does understand at last what her deserts are. I suppose this was sent privately to England, and put in the post here; yes, that must be it. And this Mr. Vere, who is he? No connexion of hers—of the Eustaces—that I ever heard of. Yet I fancy that I know something of the name; it strikes me that he is a man who made himself remarkable—said very unwarrantable things last winter about the unusual amount of distress amongst the poor. Oh ! yes, I remember now what sort of a person he is. What can he have to do with Madame Baldovini ? I dare say, if the truth were known, she has quarrelled with all her Italian relations, and wants to come back and live here. She thinks she could soon smooth down my brother's irritation—easily displace me—for no house should ever contain her ladyship and myself, that I am quite resolved on. No, no, when she enters at one door, I go out at another; and then what is to become of poor Jemima, and my son-in-law the Viscount, and their interests ? She always hated Jemima, and was insolent enough to Francis when he took the trouble to go to Paris to see her. Utter ruin to our prospects if she come here ! She is sharp-sighted enough, too ; she would soon turn to her own advantage any little embarrassments she found out in C—'s affairs. Now I am perfectly aware that Mr. Faulkner has commanded every one whom he thought the least likely to transgress, never to mention this ungrateful girl to him again. I am sure I sha'n't be the one to disobey ; and as to letting this letter fall into his hands without any preparation, I could never forgive myself for such a rash act. It really must be put out of the way ; there is no help for it.'

In her remaining moment of irresolution and scruple,

Lady Rivers cleared aside with the poker the ashes of the papers which she had already consumed; a bed of glowing coals lay beneath them. Geraldine's letter fell from her hand. There was a sudden blaze which reflected itself on Lady Rivers's face as she bent towards it, making her look as if blushing at her own act, though no human eye beheld it. Not so. So thoroughly had Lady Rivers matured the art of self-exculpation, that even this, probably the most wicked and most malignant deed she had ever been guilty of, wanted not its apologies, its reasons, its justification.

'I am sure that I have done for the best,' was her last thought, as she turned from the fire, folding up Jemima's letter, and putting it into her pocket-book.

'Now I must think how to proceed here.' Lady Rivers was haunted by one unceasing source of anxiety; this was lest her son-in-law's extravagance should ever accomplish his and her daughter's ruin, and her own shame and disgrace. She shrank from nothing so much as exposure to the remarks of all her dearest and most good-natured friends:

'I never should have expected a woman of Lady Rivers's sense to have married her daughter to a man of positively no character, merely because he had a title, and made a sensation among people of fashion. Mrs. Faulkner was a poor silly thing,—but Lady Rivers!'

Stung by the bare anticipation of words such as these, Lady Rivers had resolved that if her brother's wealth could save her from such reproach, she would make no sparing use of it.





CHAPTER XIX.

Drawing near her death, she sent most pious thoughts as harbingers to Heaven, and her soul saw a glimpse of happiness through the chinks of her sickness-broken body.

FULLER—*Holy State.*

IT was night. In the upper chamber Geraldine was lying on her bed, opposite to an unshuttered window, through which she saw the moon and the stars on one of those very beautiful, serene nights which sometimes alternate with bleak and windy days.

‘Don’t draw the curtain, Catherine,’ she had said; ‘let me gaze on the heaven whither she is going. It soothes, it calms my grief; it lulls my remorse: but that perhaps I ought not to lull.’

‘Let us now,’ replied Catherine, ‘confine our thoughts to *her*, and to her child.’

Catherine knelt beside the bed; a light burned dimly near, an open Bible lay on the chair before her. Few tears were shed by either, few words were interchanged, but from time to time Catherine read in a low distinct voice a sentence of Holy Writ, or uttered with earnest reverence a brief prayer, now for the soul that departs—now for the souls that tarry.

In the chamber underneath them lay Mary Owen, in a state of unconsciousness, and apparently of little suffering. Gwen left her not for one moment, and declined any partner of her watch.

‘No, thank you, Catherine; if there were the least thing that you could do, I would touch the bell. Go to Geraldine.’

Gwen closed the door, and went back to her mother. She looked at her calm, unanswering face, fixedly. 'I must be alone with you and with my God,' she said, and knelt down beside her as before. She kept a careful silence, for she could not tell what sounds did or did not reach her mother's ear, what sensations she might excite, what disturbance she might cause her spirit. She groaned not, sobbed not, uttered not; she was content to watch. The description of trance in which her mother now lay, had been frequent during the last days; once, on reviving, she had said to Gwen: 'I have been with Hugh; he led me by the hand through the scene of his holy labours, and I heard the heathen who praised God.'

Later again, she said:

'It is not anything I have ever seen or conceived of on earth which passes before me now; words would not describe it. I cannot bring it down to them, therefore these things are not written. Wait; you shall know.'

Gwen more than once beheld a smile, a radiance of joy diffuse itself over her mother's countenance, and her own heart participated in the emotion. She could at such moments scarcely refrain from exclaiming with delight:

'My heart is ready! oh God! my heart is ready!'

There were intervals in which she bowed down her head on her hands, and murmured, inwardly:

'Thine arrows stick fast in me, and Thy hand presseth me sore.'

At length she saw that her mother strove to speak, and applying her ear to her lips, she could just distinguish the words: 'My Gwen, my dutiful child!'

Gwen clasped her hands to her heart; it was as if a tide were going over it, suffocating her. She with difficulty refrained from uttering one sharp cry for relief, but that would have summoned a human being to her side, a presence which she felt would have been insupportable. Her next impulse was to cast herself on the fragile form, and cover the chill pale face with

her kisses. But she bid herself be still. Her passionate emotion subsided. She heard her mother's last sigh, and her last words abided with her for ever.

Gwen appeared at the door of the chamber in which Catherine and Geraldine were praying for her. She did not speak, but her appearance there spoke; it said that all was over. Geraldine held out both her hands. Gwen turned away; but the thought, 'She also is an orphan, and can I wound an orphan in this first hour of my own orphanhood?' passed through her mind; she came up to the bed, took Geraldine's hands in hers, and kissed her.

Catherine and Geraldine knew that she could do no more; she had done to her utmost, and they let her pass from their presence like a wan spectre with a noiseless step. They heard the door of her chamber close.





CHAPTER XX.

Unwilling to surrender
Dreams treasured up from early days
The holy and the tender.

WORDSWORTH.

IT was a month since Mrs. Owen's death. Catherine and Gwen were sitting together, in one of the latter's leisure hours; she had scarcely as yet attempted to resume her usual avocations, and as it was evening, they were secure against interruption, and unoccupied by Geraldine. The first was examining a letter which she held in her hand, with considerable signs of distress. The second looked so pale in her deep mourning, and was so very still since her bereavement came upon her, that it was not easy to discern what sensations were excited by any passing occurrence. She spoke in a low, measured tone—

‘I see, dear Catherine, what your position is—what you have to do. It seems to you as if you had a divided duty, but indeed you have not. Go to your parents—leave Geraldine with me. It must be so.’ So saying, she pointed to these words in Mrs. Irving's letter :

‘Your father's eyesight is now so bad that he can scarcely find his way about the house, and I am very crippled. My breath fails me, and I can't give him the attendance he requires, nor read as would be a comfort to him. But till you can come yourself, we will go on as we are. We should not like strangers about us.’

While Mrs. Owen lived, Catherine had asked her

parents to wait a little ; things were no worse than they had been. They had refrained from calling her from Mrs. Faulkner's death-bed ; they allowed her to linger at Geraldine's side ; but now Catherine felt that she must decide, and in their favour. Their claim was of all claims the most sacred. She had considered every alternative.

'I cannot bring them here ; and to take her there—the very place would kill her. I cannot make one home for them in that way.'

'Nor in any way, Catherine,' replied Gwen. 'You could not provide for all, tax yourself as you would.'

'I could not ask more help from Mr. Faulkner for ourselves—and for her—there is always his express command against that ; and now this last cruel—I can't help thinking Lady Rivers must have had to do with it ; but I don't like to suppose a sin—even for her—'

'No,' said Gwen, with a shudder.

'Yet, indeed, Miss Gwen, I have felt inclined more than once to go to her, and ask her about it. If I looked her in the face I should know.' Catherine was lost in silent speculation for awhile, starting from which, she said, 'But you say I am not able—are you? You don't look equal to great present exertion.'

'I am more capable of it than I look,' replied Gwen, quietly.

'I must help—you would not refuse me that favour. She has the first claims on me after I have done for my parents—no one can dispute that.'

'Catherine,' said Gwen, 'I would never deny your generous heart its greatest pleasure ; why should I? But let us have truth, the best of all things. You always speak as if you owed everything to the Faulkners. Now it is not so. They can never repay you for any part of what you have done.'

'Oh ! don't, Miss Gwen, don't,' interrupted Catherine, almost angrily. 'I never can let any one say such things.' Turning away, she burst into tears,

adding, 'It seems almost like a sin to quit this poor child now.'

Gwen took Catherine's hand tenderly—with a tenderness none could surpass. 'Trust her to me,' she said; 'it shall be a sacred trust.'

Catherine caught the pale, earnest Gwen to her bosom, and held her there in an embrace which told her that she could yield the precious confidence she asked.

Gwen went silently to her chamber, and there thought over all that had passed.

'I shall not go to Hugh!' at length she exclaimed. 'And no one will know of it; none but he ever shall. I shall tell him how it is, and he will see my duty as I do. He will remember the hour when I stood her pitiless accuser before him, and bless that which has made me her protectress. And do I not thank God that a day of reparation has arrived, when I can do something more than bewail in words the sin of the past? I do from my heart. Once I bid Hugh renounce her. I now have to renounce Hugh for her. This is just. It shall be acceptable to me.' Gwen bethought her of her favourite lines:

'Never so safe as when the will
Yields undiscerned by all but God.'

The sweetness of Geraldine's acquiescence in the decisions of her best friends concerning her was unparalleled in her past life.

'That two or one should make me the object of love and care, why should this be?—how do I deserve it?—ought I even to permit it? Promise me, Gwen—if through any of your friends, any of those families in which you teach—mind, not through Lady St. Ruth, I do not mean her—you were ever to hear of some asylum to which I could be admitted, so that I should no longer be a burden to you and to Catherine—promise me that I shall go to it.'

'Yes, when I can spare you,' said Gwen, playfully.

‘Not very kind of you, Geraldine, to propose to leave me alone now that Catherine must go. Do you think,’ she added, in a tone of seriousness, ‘that it will be nothing to me to have you to come back to at the end of my day?—still to possess an object to which to consecrate the fruit of my toil?’

‘But you might find a worthier,’ replied Geraldine, much touched.

‘I think not,’ said Gwen, after a pause, as if of consideration.

‘But why, Geraldine,’ she added, presently, ‘did you say, ‘not Lady St. Ruth?’’

‘I will tell you,’ returned Geraldine, after a pause; ‘though I do not like to do so. You remember—you have heard it from Catherine—my banishment from Court. You know that Lord and Lady St. Ruth came to Italy the winter after Dora’s marriage and mine. Of course she gave a short time to beautiful Florence. Oh! how the sight of her face rejoiced my heart! We met first where all the world meet—in the *Tribuna*. I could have sprung to embrace her, but she had not shaken off her English reserve enough for that, especially with Lord St. Ruth at her side—at least, so I read her constraint. How superior I thought my husband to hers. He chilled me; I disliked him from the first moment—much more afterwards—’

‘Oh! Geraldine, you do not know him. He is truly noble-minded, and worthy of her!’

‘Perhaps so; I dare say he is, but it was not very unnatural that I should hate him then, dear Gwen, as you will allow when you hear. I am sure that he objected from the first to any very intimate intercourse between us. I did not choose to perceive this; I had not the delicacy nor the good sense to consent to it. I had never been accustomed to repulse or denial. I scorned to retreat; I wished for victory. Then a mad fancy flashed across my brain while smarting under the correction my grandfather had administered, that I might conquer him yet, and appear at the *Pitti* in

spite of his veto. I went to Dora, and asked her to use her influence, her husband's influence, with the English Ambassador, and to urge him to present me as his countrywoman. Of course the St. Ruths refused. I see by your face what you think of my exposing myself to such a refusal. I know what I think of it myself now; but spoiled children have no true dignity. To get their own way, by one means or another—that is the point, the very little point on which their minds centre. I felt great resentment then; I thought nothing of the pain it must have cost kind, gentle Dora to deny me, but solely of my own wounded pride and disappointment. You see why I should not like to appear again before her as a suppliant.'

Catherine went to her parents, and Gwen and Geraldine removed to smaller lodgings; the latter was necessarily much alone, and solitude did not suit her nature or her circumstances. Gwen was grieved to see this. She commended her afresh to Mr. Vere, and he was very kind to her; he lent her books, which Geraldine read with a degree of interest surprising both to herself and her cousin, when they remembered how averse she used to be to the occupation.

'But what use is all this to Gwen?' she asked. 'How I wish I could help her. I would make her clothes, or anything.' She set to work, and proved that she was really very clever with her fingers. She accomplished many little articles of Gwen's dress, and examined them with delight when they were done; then she laughed at herself for childishness, reminding Gwen for a moment of Mrs. Faulkner's most musical laugh—but only for a moment, for Geraldine and her mother could never bear more than a transient resemblance to each other. 'Who would have thought my needle could have given me so much pleasure?' she said, looking up at Gwen.

But she soon found that needle-work injured her sight, and was forced to relinquish it. She sighed:

'It is of no use to blind myself; I sha'n't be any the less troublesome for that.'

But Mr. Vere and Gwen sought other employment for her.

‘I think you shall be a schoolmistress, like me, Geraldine,’ said Gwen.

‘I teach!—I have never half learned yet!’

But Gwen brought some young girls round Geraldine’s couch. Their happy, simple faces cheered her, and the teacher and her pupils loved and instructed each other. Their parents heard with interest of the sick lady, and many prayers and blessings were won for her.

Gwen discovered that her cousin had one harassing regret; it was her undischarged debt to the generous, confiding, faithful Antonio. When Catherine first offered a contribution to their expenses, which she had accumulated with the utmost satisfaction, Gwen said to her:

‘Take it, dearest Catherine, to Geraldine, and tell her to send good old Antonio his Napoleons. For our English credit do this, and it will give her such pleasure.’

Gwen was not mistaken; Catherine’s gift could not have given more.

A long, patient, uneventful period of time passed on. Full seven years made little difference to any except the aged parents of Catherine. Her father first sunk into the tranquil grave, there to rest—there to wait. Catherine continued at her mother’s side till her eyes were also closed in death. She then contemplated a return to Gwen and Geraldine. In a brief correspondence they agreed on the measure; and Catherine, after her mother’s simple funeral, began the necessary preparations for change of residence.





CHAPTER XXI.

—— Oh ! let me stay
And comfort you, my master.

SHAKESPEARE.

ONE day towards evening, Catherine unexpectedly arrived from Brighton. Geraldine welcomed her with delight.

‘And Miss Gwen ; is she out ?’

‘Yes, and will not be in till five o’clock. My dear Catherine, I am so glad to see you. Sit down by me. But you don’t look comfortable ; I am afraid something is the matter. You never spoke of coming.’

‘No, Miss Geraldine, nor did I mean it so soon. There is no reason to make any mystery with you about it, nor indeed with any one. The cause of my coming up to London was my seeing in the newspaper yesterday that Mr. Faulkner——.’ She paused.

‘Oh ! Catherine, don’t tell me that he is dead—without—’

‘No, no, I could not have been so cruel as to tell you, with so little preparation ; it never struck me that you could—’

‘What then ? Anything must be better than that,’ said Geraldine, her terror subsiding, but still pale and trembling.

‘He is a bankrupt ; I could not believe it. However, I resolved to come to see. I made up my mind what to do if it were so ; and as I travelled I had the opportunity of making further inquiries. There is not any doubt, not the least.’

‘Poor Mr. Faulkner ! he who made such a liberal

use of his money. I am sure it must be his generosity which in some way has injured him now.'

'I went to the counting-house, but it was shut; no business doing there to-day. I hope I shall be able to see Mr. Scott at six o'clock, and this evening I shall go to the Square.'

Geraldine shuddered.

Gwen came in: 'You here, Catherine! how strange!'

'Why?' asked Catherine, struck by the tone of her voice.

'Ah! Gwen, you know it!' exclaimed Geraldine.

Gwen looked from one to the other, sorrowfully: 'Is it that which brought you here, Catherine?' she asked.

'It is.'

'What, to learn the truth?'

'I want to see Mr. Scott,' replied Catherine, with a little embarrassment. Gwen took an opportunity of drawing her aside:

'Dear Catherine, this may have inconvenienced you—caused some unfortunate delay; if so, I have a small sum of money in hand.'

'Oh! no, Miss Gwen, indeed. You are not to do for everybody, nor is it the least as you imagine. Of course, I am anxious about my dear master.'

Gwen looked as if she reproached herself. She had for the moment hurt Catherine's feelings, an offence rare with her, but she was already forgiven; and Catherine regretted the betrayal of annoyance where generous consideration was meant.

Catherine now set out in search of Mr. Scott; she found him.

'Sad business, Mrs. Irving; but I don't see how it can have brought you to town.'

'I will explain it, Mr. Scott; and to you better than to another. You can help me to do as I desire. I want to give up the annuity Mr. Faulkner generously allotted to me. I can do very well without it, and I think it may be of use now in this time of distress.'

The clerk cleared his throat, and looked out of the window :

‘ You have had no time for consideration. You don’t know what you say.’

‘ Yes, I do. I have had a night to sleep on it; that is enough.’

‘ A mere drop in the ocean what you would give up, and to you it is a serious affair.’

‘ Oh ! no, it is not. I can earn my livelihood as well now as ever.’

‘ I dare say you can,’ replied Scott, glancing at the sensible, healthy-looking woman who was addressing him. ‘ Now, Mrs. Irving, I will speak my mind to you as a friend. I see plainly that you wish to serve Mr. Faulkner; you won’t do so in the way you propose. Such a mite would be swallowed up at once by his creditors, and leave him where he was before. It was a just debt to you; no reason for your not being paid for past services, any more than others to whom he may have contracted debts. Wait quietly and see. Perhaps you may make it available to him at another time much more to his advantage than now.’

Catherine listened, and did not know whether she was convinced and satisfied, or not; but she consented to do as Mr. Scott advised,—‘ to wait quietly and see,’—and she proceeded to ——— Square. The door of the house was opened by a maid servant.

‘ Are not the family here, Ann ?’ asked Catherine.

‘ Mrs. Irving ! is it you ? Dear me ! who would have thought it ! Such doings—I suppose there are no secrets from you,’ continued the girl, whispering. ‘ Six of us discharged this morning, with a month’s wages ; and my lady, she goes to Ireland to-morrow, and I go with her.’

‘ And Mr. Faulkner ?’ asked Catherine, who had sunk down on one of the hall chairs, overpowered by re-entering the house in which Mrs. Faulkner had died under such circumstances as the present.

‘ Oh ! master’s here.’

‘ At home—now ?’

‘ Yes ; in the dining-room.’

‘ Lady Rivers ; is she with him ?’

‘ I am not sure ; I think so.’

‘ Go and ask him if he will see me.’

Ann went a few steps, then stopped :

‘ I’m afraid : he does look so black. I am afraid to speak to him unless he begins.’

‘ Nonsense, Ann,’ said Catherine, resolutely. ‘ You must go, or I must enter alone, which will make him more angry.’

Thus urged, Ann went, and Catherine was admitted.

Mr. Faulkner was now a man near seventy. Catherine had not seen him for several years, but had they met a month since, she would have been almost equally surprised at the change which had taken place in his looks within that period. His countenance was haggard, and dejected in the extreme.

‘ Is it possible that his sister is going to leave him ?’ thought Catherine, casting a glance towards that sister, who, considerably younger than her brother, and bearing no such deep marks of distress as were imprinted on his brow, looked very much as when Catherine last saw her. Lady Rivers, growing old in callous selfishness, was incapable of being by the heaviest sorrows more than what on lighter occasions she aptly called ‘ excessively worried.’ There was that in Mr. Faulkner’s present mien, however, which effectually frightened her out of being ‘ excessively worrying.’ She therefore sat in silence.

On seeing Catherine, Mr. Faulkner started with annoyance, repelling the warm affection with which she came forward to meet him. Chilled in spite of her long knowledge of his proud nature, she took the chair to which he pointed, checking with difficulty the tears which she thought would increase his displeasure.

'It is a surprise to see you in London, Catherine,' observed Lady Rivers, with an attempt at ease.

'I only came from Brighton to-day,' replied Catherine; and turning to Mr. Faulkner, she exclaimed:

'Oh, my dear master, I came to see if I could not be of some use to you.'

'No, no, my good friend; there is nothing for you to do.'

'Sir, I can't believe that; if it were ever so little, I should be glad to do it; if you would but give me leave to speak to you freely—'

Catherine's involuntary meaning was a wish to be released from Lady Rivers's presence.

Mr. Faulkner suddenly rose from his seat, and took two or three turns in the room; it was as if some sudden remembrance had stung him to the quick. Neither Lady Rivers nor Catherine could do otherwise than regard him in silence. After a few turns more, he threw open one of the folding doors; the room was in darkness beyond.

'Catherine,' he said, 'come here; bring a light.'

Catherine obeyed, and closed the door.

Mr. Faulkner threw himself into an arm-chair, leant back, covered his face with his hands, and groaned. Catherine stood beside him:

'My dear, kind master, let me stay with you—be your servant. Some one you must have; better my face than a stranger's.'

'Catherine, you don't know what you say; your face is exactly the one I can least bear to look upon. I have injured you more than any other, and small amends is it to say that it was done through sheer forgetfulness. I never till this moment remembered—' he paused. Catherine listened with breathless attention.

'It is too bad to be believed. I fear—pshaw—I am certain of it now—that I have never secured the principal of your annuity; it will go with the rest.'

Catherine did not immediately speak. She had come fully prepared, heartily desirous to give up for Mr. Faulkner's use the sum of money he had appropriated to her; but this was a very different trial of her feelings, and it was impossible that a blank sense of disappointment should not come over her. She felt that it was depicted on her countenance, would be misinterpreted, and aggravate the pain and self-reproach which her master already experienced. Moved by these considerations, and these alone, she exclaimed :

‘Well, it can’t be helped ; but don’t think you have injured me. It will make no difference to me that I was not prepared for. Yes, indeed, sir, I only speak the truth ; I came to London on purpose to resign this sum. I felt that you might have more urgent calls on it than your past use of it ; I came to be of some little service to you, sir, and you must allow me to find another mode.’

‘You have a noble heart, Catherine ; but though my shameful carelessness has injured you, I could never have had the meanness to rob you knowingly.’

‘Perhaps not, sir, if you are pleased to express it so,’ replied Catherine. ‘It often is the fault of generous people that they don’t know how to accept, and I think it would very likely be yours. Forgive my plainness ; you are used to it. Shall you be alone to-morrow, sir ?’

‘Yes ; my sister goes in the morning. It is better that she should.’

‘I think so too, if she can,’ thought Catherine ; but she merely said, ‘Then, sir, I may come back and stay here to-morrow night ?’

‘Well, if you will—if you choose. I have little right to refuse you anything you can ask.’

Greatly to Catherine’s relief, Lady Rivers was no longer in the room to which they returned ; and wishing Mr. Faulkner good night, she went to Gwen’s lodgings.

‘I don’t know that she could inflict a greater punishment on me than her presence, constantly reminding me of the injury I have inflicted—constantly recalling the past ; but it would grieve her faithful spirit to reject the service she is fain to render,’ thought Mr. Faulkner, as he stood gloomily by the fire after Catherine was gone.





CHAPTER XXII.

I now can see with better eyes,
And worldly grandeur I despise,
And fortune with her gifts and lies.

WORDSWORTH.

NO circumstance in the past or present ever more truly humiliated Mr. Faulkner than the irreparable defect which he discovered in the discharge of his duty to Catherine ; and it, as no real humiliation fails to do, exercised a salutary influence on his character. As far as a means of working that change which was requisite in the proud man's heart, it could less well have been spared than many others of apparently more importance.

The beginning of the involvement of Mr. Faulkner's commercial business might be dated with precision from the wreck of his domestic happiness—the death of Diane, the defection of her daughter. By the last his spirit had been embittered more than he or others would have anticipated as the consequences of any provocation which the wilful girl could offer ; while the melancholy details of the first had produced a depression which he strove to cast off by entering into such engagements as should absorb and stimulate his mind to the utmost. The vindictiveness which he cherished occasioned him many a pang of self-reproach, and seemed to rise up between him and all holy aspirations. Yet would he not relent ; he felt as if any species of retractation lowered him in his own eyes, and when most disturbed by dissatisfaction, he forced his thoughts

into another channel, and escaped torment for a time. Wherever he perceived a blank, he hastened to fill it up, lest some spectre of the past should rise to occupy it. Now Mr. Faulkner was too old a man to enter successfully on his present course. He had not grown more circumspect, nor more timorous by age; but on the contrary, as sometimes happens, more rash and reckless, blind to danger, deaf to counsel, impatient of restraint. He embarked in speculations which ten years before he would have scrutinised with an eye too keen not to have pierced through their flimsy veil of promise. So far as Lady Rivers exercised any influence over him on such points, it was of a tendency directly to encourage the tone of mind and the views which rendered enterprise alluring. Every apparent accession of wealth filled her grasping spirit with delight, and by all means in her power she urged her brother onward in his career, and fostered every evil feeling which militated against peace of mind. The one bold master injury which she had inflicted on Geraldine forced her to guard every avenue to renewed intercourse with her with a hydra vigilance, and harder grew the heart engrossed in purposes so cruel and base. Sober remonstrance and friendly warning more than once came to the lips of Scott, but Mr. Faulkner was not a man to facilitate the utterance of these sentiments. The storm arose at length with a suddenness and violence, baffling resistance and surpassing expectation. It was a whirlwind that swept the ground bare. Mr. Faulkner looked around on the destruction of his fortune, and recalling his bewildered senses, began to ask with solicitude where were his honesty—his honour? A spirit, too, which had derived its chief happiness through life from acts of generosity, naturally suffered acutely at the thought of the misery in which his ruin would involve numbers.

All that a man so situated could do, Mr. Faulkner resolved to effect without loss of time. He spoke to his sister with brotherly affection and consideration;

he felt with more than common tenderness that she alone was left to him of nearest and dearest. He thought neither of her faults nor deficiencies, but solely of the tie of relationship. His endeavour was to make plain to her what his dangers and liabilities were, and what the line of conduct which he was bound to pursue. He spoke as briefly as possible—too briefly, perhaps, to be intelligible to any one less versed in business than himself.

Lady Rivers listened with consternation, and understood enough to hazard a proposal of flight—retirement—withdrawal—she could not decide on a satisfactory term. Her brother stood for one moment before her, and in that moment looked on her with a concentration of scorn on his face before which the meaner spirit quailed.

‘Do you know what you are proposing?’ he said.

Lady Rivers murmured something in the negative.

‘Fraud!’ replied Mr. Faulkner, in his sternest tone.

It was some little time before they could again address each other with ease and friendliness. Mr. Faulkner reproached himself secretly with excess of severity, conscience whispering to him that it was his old, often repeated fault. Lady Rivers was angry, and her anger burnt fiercely enough to extinguish the feebler flame of her pity and her love. She resented Mr. Faulkner’s accusation, and saw that he was bent on ruining himself; and if so, no one could help him. It would be madness for her to stay to make so vain an attempt. When, therefore, he generously counselled her to leave him, she acquiesced—not more readily, he told himself, than she had a right to do when he had suggested this as the wisest plan for her to adopt, but still more readily than he had quite expected, or could quite forgive. Lady Rivers did not endeavour to discern the course of emotions which he studiously concealed, and satisfied herself that she had made a right decision, and one which, after all, would be most for Augustus’s comfort. On this last point Augustus

probably would not now greatly have differed with her. The time of her departure was accordingly fixed, and the hours which preceded it were busily employed in packing up everything that she could by any pretext call her own, for Mr. Faulkner had announced his intention to sell the house and all the costly furniture (the selection of poor Diane) immediately. The very morning that Lady Rivers went away, a board, 'to sell,' was erected, and before night Mr. Faulkner and Catherine were established in a nook of the splendid mansion, where the latter prepared, with all possible attention to comfort, an evening meal which she had the disappointment to see her wearied master unable to partake of. While it was still almost untasted, she heard the injunction :

'Clear all this away, Catherine, as soon as you can. I expect Scott here for the evening, and we shall want the table for our papers.'

Catherine sighed, and had scarcely yielded that prompt obedience which, as she well knew of old, Mr. Faulkner valued beyond any other token of regard, before Mr. Scott appeared, apparently as composed, certainly as respectful as ever. It was midnight ere he departed, and Catherine was inexpressibly shocked at the sight of Mr. Faulkner's haggard countenance, as she went to entreat him to take some refreshment before retiring 'to rest' died away unpronounced on her lips ; the word sounded like mockery.

In the course of that evening Mr. Faulkner had for once forgotten the clerk in the trusty friend of thirty years.

'Scott,' he said, grasping his hand, 'look round this empty house, and tell me what I have to consider but my honour ?'

These words uttered, they entered on their business.

A few days after Lady Rivers's departure Catherine went to open the hall-door in answer to a vigorous ring at the bell, and found there Sir Francis Rivers.

‘You are the very person I most wish to see, Catherine,’ he said. ‘My uncle not here?’

‘No, sir; will you come in?’

Sir Francis followed in silence to Mr. Faulkner’s apartment. Catherine closed the door, and burst into tears. The sight of the baronet’s open countenance, the tone of his voice, so true to his inward feelings, were too much for her.

‘I was in Ireland when my mother arrived. As soon as I understood how things were, I came off here. How does the poor old man bear up, Catherine?’

Catherine started. Such a designation of Mr. Faulkner accorded little with her former notions of him, and quite as ill with his present attitude of uncompromising determination.

‘Oh! sir,’ she replied, ‘Mr. Faulkner bears up nobly, just as you might look for. He will satisfy his creditors to the last: it is all he is bent on—unsparing to himself in every way. How long is it since you have seen him?’

‘Years, Catherine. My regiment has been in America.’

‘Then, sir, of course he is very different in looks. Mr. Faulkner is an old man now.’ Catherine felt that she did not wish Sir Francis to know that the few last weeks had worked more of the change he would witness than years that went before.

‘I hope that it won’t annoy my uncle to see me here. I could not stay away. I may be of some use and comfort to him. Eh, Catherine?’

‘I don’t know, sir; I should hope so. He seems to feel terribly the first sight of any one he loves, and then to reconcile himself to it, and to value their presence greatly.’

‘Just as it is likely to be,’ said Sir Francis. ‘I am sure he will be glad of me. Do you know that poor Agnes is here—that is to say, in lodgings at Hampstead. London did not suit her, and she was moved

there. I must go to see her; I have promised my mother to arrange her affairs.'

Sir Francis talked on freely, but kept to himself the fact that Lady Rivers had urged him to relinquish his promptly-formed determination to go to his uncle, and offer him every service in his power, and all the money at his command.

'Impossible, mother, that you can doubt for a moment that, indebted to him as we have been throughout life, we are bound to come forward on such an emergency?'

Lady Rivers thought differently; hoped Mr. Faulkner would be content to have ruined himself, and not involve her children in his misfortunes. The Irish Viscount called Sir Francis a fine noble fellow, wished it were in his power to follow his example, and to accompany him to England for such a purpose; but really it would be vain for him to come, for he had nothing to offer—very hard up this year, could not imagine how—but so it was. He saw Sir Francis on board the steamer, shook his hand heartily, and went homewards commenting on the bore of having Jemima's mother in his house. He never could endure her; her brother was worth a thousand of her, and the very last man he should ever have expected to see in such a scrape.

It never once seemed to occur to Sir Francis that had Mr. Faulkner died a *millionaire*, which less than a fortnight ago he was supposed to be, he would probably have been the heir to the accumulated wealth. He had always emphatically maintained that his uncle's riches were his own, to do exactly as he pleased with. His present cordial offers of services met with unequivocal refusals of acceptance from Mr. Faulkner. 'My creditors can have no claim on you. I begin to believe that I can satisfy them; if not, the suffering unhappily must be theirs, and the dishonour my own, neither ought to fall on you.'

Sir Francis was incapable of conceiving the base

projects of evasion which had occurred to his mother, and rejoiced to see the high spirit of integrity which his uncle evinced. Nor were Mr. Faulkner's last hopes and desires defeated. After a long and painful investigation and arrangement of his affairs, the claims of his creditors were satisfied, and from the wreck of his princely fortune a few thousands were preserved for himself. Mr. Faulkner's first act was to make a will, in which he named Catherine his heir, resolved to indemnify her for the severe loss she had sustained by his negligence. On his slender income he determined to retire to Boulogne. To Lady Rivers's disgrace, be it recorded, that her house threw not wide its doors to offer a home to her brother ; an offer she might have made secure of refusal, for all thoughts of residing in his own country were odious to Mr. Faulkner. As little did she allude to the possibility of accompanying him abroad, and attending the closing days of one who had allowed her to profit so largely by his prosperity. This is the last notice that we shall bestow on this Lady. Some of her gravest offences met with no detection by human eye, no chastisement through human instruments. But she had her dark hours of misgiving, that made her quail at the thought of the time when there shall be no secret undivulged.





CHAPTER XXIII.

Is there no means for me to purchase peace ?

SPENSER.

‘CATHERINE,’ asked Geraldine, in a tone of deep despondency, after listening to the details she had to give ; ‘and in all these days—weeks even—has he never made the slightest allusion to me? knowing, as he must know, that of my life, my death, of whatever may have befallen me, you must possess the secret?’

Catherine could not deny Mr. Faulkner’s silence. ‘I have not ventured,’ at last she replied, ‘to bring into his mind any fresh subject of pain ; but though I may not say that he has ever referred to you directly or indirectly, yet, you know it is quite as impossible for me to affirm that you do not enter his thoughts. Indeed I know not how he could have me near him and not recal you.’

‘But to think of me, and not to speak—that proves that he has forgiven me as little as the first day his wrath burst out, and now, Catherine—’ Geraldine grew paler as she spoke : ‘if you could know how my heart yearns for his forgiveness—as it never has yearned before—not even when I wrote my letter. I felt then that the want of his pardon clove to me like a curse ; that I ought not to die without seeking it ; that less than so doing would not content myself nor you. I believed it would be denied, and this was a source of terror, rather than of grief. Little tender-

ness mingled with my remembrance of him, or my sorrow for having offended him. Perhaps you did not know how unsoftened I still remained. I think sometimes I merited to have my letter neglected, scorned, as it was. But now that he is impoverished, broken down, carrying his grey hairs to a foreign shore, I feel as if I envied you the pettiest service you can render, and as if, unable like you to aid and to comfort, I would at least drag myself to his feet before he departs, and kneel and water them with my tears. And yet you do not hold out to me the slightest hope of effecting this.'

Geraldine spoke almost in the passionate tones of her youth.

'I don't know that at this moment he can be agitated by any new and abrupt disclosure; perhaps he believes you are still in Italy, with your grandmother,' replied Catherine, thoughtfully. 'Will you give me permission to mention you to your always true friend, Sir Francis?'

'Oh! no, no,' cried Geraldine, covering her face with her hands.

'He spoke to me about you, almost as soon as he saw me. How strange that at this very moment while we are talking, there is Miss Agnes passing with her maid along the street, just opposite the house.'

'Oh! where? where? open the window—help me to look out.' And Geraldine strained forward, and watched the unconscious Agnes till she was out of sight; then, sinking back with a sigh, she said:

'Catherine, you may wonder, but of all living, there are none I have so often wished to see, to speak to, as my poor Agnes. Do you think she is happy? Do you suppose that she remembers me?'

'I am sure that she treasures an image of you in her memory, but whether she would be able to recognise you, and to accommodate herself in any way to things present, I cannot tell. She would not know what is real, what a dream, I think.'

‘Poor Agnes! clearer heads than hers may doubt that,’ said Geraldine, pressing her hand to her forehead.

‘I don’t think that it would be impossible to gratify your wish to see her,’ continued Catherine, cautiously; ‘if you would allow me to speak of it to Sir Francis. She is in lodgings at Hampstead, he goes to visit her. I suppose that he will remove her, ere long.’

Geraldine, in silence and tears, reflected on these words. At last, when Catherine rose to quit her, she murmured:

‘You may do what you can, what you will, about Agnes. I would suffer much to see her—but quite alone—spare me, Catherine, spare me, don’t put too much upon me. Indeed I could not bear it.’ She looked up with such tearful supplication as must have touched any heart Catherine thought, and as she bent down to kiss her, she whispered, ‘Don’t be afraid, my child, to trust me.’

When Catherine had told Geraldine that Sir Francis had spoken of her, she had not ventured to repeat his words, for she knew that Geraldine would find a sting in them. Nevertheless, Catherine was well persuaded that no bitterness dwelt in his heart, and that a brief revelation of what Geraldine had suffered, and a simple description of the change which suffering had wrought in her, would be enough to fill it with love and pity. Finding him within, on her return home, she at once addressed him, saying:

‘Sir Francis, the first day I saw you, you asked me questions about the poor Countess Baldovini, which I could not answer then. I am sure that it was a true and lasting interest which made you speak, and now I could tell you some things which would gratify that feeling—’

‘What! have you had letters from her?’ asked Sir Francis, eagerly.

‘No, I don’t need letters. She is too near for that.’

‘Too near; what can you mean?’

‘So near, I mean, that I could take Miss Agnes to visit her if you would consent to it—she could bear to be seen by her, in her changed condition; indeed, it is her most anxious desire. She shrinks from almost every eye; but for Miss Agnes, with whom it was always a touching sight to see her, she longs even now.’

‘Is it possible? Would you say that she is actually in London?’

‘I would.’

‘Since when?’

‘Ever since her mother’s death.’

‘Incredible, Catherine! How has she lived, unknown, uncared for, by any of her former friends, yet close at hand?’

‘Not altogether unknown nor uncared for, Sir Francis. There has been one who, labouring for her own daily bread, has daily shared it with Geraldine; has lodged, nursed, soothed her, attended on her, for she is unable to do much for herself.’

‘Why? is she ill?’

‘She has been injured by a very severe fall—her beauty is faded—her frame crippled. Oh! Sir Francis, if you could see all that remains of the too lovely, too bright creature you remember—’

‘I must see her.’

‘I don’t know that she could bear that—at least let her see Miss Agnes first.’

‘But who has thus acted a sisterly part? good heavens! Why has she not been as a sister to Agnes—shared her home?’

‘Well, sir, it does seem as if it might have been so, but Mr. Faulkner’s doors have been closed against the poor thing from the day she rashly quitted them, and I don’t know that Lady Rivers could have made it different.’

‘But, Catherine, I have sometimes thought that it seemed very heartless or very haughty of Geraldine

never to make any advances to my uncle—at such a period as her mother's death, for instance.'

'At that time, sir, my poor child was lying in a brain fever—and after—may God forgive Mr. Faulkner for the rejection she met with.'

'Can you mean that she ever did make an appeal to him?'

'Certainly I do.'

'Why, my mother told me a short while since that Mr. Faulkner had never heard a word of her since his wife's death.'

'Well, sir, Lady Rivers may be ignorant of the fact I speak of,' replied Catherine, unshaken.

Both were silent, both averse to continue the subject further. Sir Francis was sincerely grieved at this proof of his uncle's still vindictive disposition.

At length he added:

'But you have not told me yet who really does support Geraldine?'

'She who has done so much for her, sir, is herself no more than a daily governess, with little to look to except her own talents and exertions. She believed herself under great obligations formerly to Mr. and Mrs. Faulkner, and so she was; but without any such incitement, I will venture to say she would have done all she has done.'

'Noble—generous! why my uncle's most munificent acts are not in fact to compare with this. How can she be rewarded?'

'Oh! sir, not by us!'

'True, true—— I will bring Agnes up to my lodgings, Catherine, without loss of time to-morrow morning, if you like—and what then?'

'Promise her, sir, that I will take her a walk when she gets to London, and then she shall go to see the Countess. You shall hear what effect the meeting has on both, poor things!'

This plan met with no obstacle in its accomplishment. Catherine prepared Geraldine for her probable arrival,

and went to meet and to fulfil her promise to Agnes. In the commencement of their walk, she spoke of Geraldine, and Agnes entered with alacrity and pleasure into the conversation. Catherine proceeded to ask her :

‘ Shall I take you to a lady very like Geraldine, and who would be quite as glad to see you as she could be? I don’t mean like Miss Geraldine was when she played with you at Lascelles ; older, paler, and ill, and lame ; but still like her.’

‘ Oh ! but Geraldine was quite changed from what she used to be when I saw her last.’

‘ You mean at Lascelles, when you could not make me understand that you had seen her?’

‘ Yes. How glad I am that you understand now. But why could I not find her, Catherine?’

‘ Because it was not the will of God, Miss Agnes.’

They reached the house, and entered. Geraldine lay awaiting them in breathless agitation.

‘ Agnes, my own Agnes,’ she exclaimed, holding out her arms. Agnes threw herself into them. ‘ It is Geraldine ; not like Geraldine—but Geraldine,’ she cried, laughing and sobbing at the same time.

‘ Oh ! my Agnes, I have so often longed for you in my lonely hours—lying here—and now I have you, but only for a moment.’

‘ Why not? Why can’t you come home to us? You can’t live here all alone.’

‘ Yes, I must. But do you think you might be allowed to come to me sometimes?’

‘ I would rather take you home.’

Geraldine shook her head mournfully :

‘ What an unchanged heart!’ she said.

At last Catherine was forced to separate them. Agnes cried bitterly. Geraldine covered her face to shut out the sight of her grief.

‘ My selfish wish to see her has only been productive of pain!’

‘ No, no, I trust not,’ replied Catherine, in a cheering tone.



CHAPTER XXIV.

And life a mist of hurrying years,
Regrets, and sighs, and tears—
It seems the unravelling of life's scroll.
What thoughts within that chain are bound ?
If aught doth wound the soul
'Tis that we others wound.

Thoughts in Past Years.

CATHERINE uttered no injunctions of secrecy to Agnes. Sir Francis had directed her to conduct his sister to —— Square, where he would call and drive her home rather late in the day. Catherine sought neither to confuse nor to impose any painful restraint on poor Agnes's feeble mind ; she wished that she might give her own simple recital of all that had passed to her brother, and could not help entertaining an indefinite hope that the circumstances of this day might have some further undesigned good effect on Geraldine's circumstances :

'She will feel grateful to Sir Francis for the pleasure he has afforded her, and will hardly like to refuse a request on his part, if he have one to make.'

'Catherine,' said Agnes, with an abruptness that startled her companion, 'Geraldine does not look very happy.'

'No, she is very unhappy,' replied Catherine, half involuntarily.

'Is she ? Why ? Why can't she come home ? We could make her happier there.'

'Because your uncle is angry with her, Miss Agnes ; that is the reason why she has never come home since

you saw her at Lascelles, and she can't be happy till he forgives her.'

'But if she is very sorry, what can he want more? Perhaps he does not know how sorry she is, and how thin and pale she looks?'

'Perhaps not,' returned Catherine, sighing.

'And will no one tell him? I may tell Francis, may I not?'

'Oh! yes, you may talk to him as you go home,' said Catherine.

When they entered the house, Catherine bid Agnes to go to the library and wait there for Sir Francis, opening the door to her as she spoke, and closing it again without observing that on the sofa at the end of the room lay Mr. Faulkner, asleep. His return home at this hour of the day was unusual, but of this Agnes was unconscious, and therefore saw nothing in his presence to hinder her obedience to Catherine's injunction. Anxious not to disturb him, she drew near carefully on tiptoe, and looked down on the old man's face with a species of fear, searching there for that anger which she was told was the cause of her favourite Geraldine's grief. Yet certainly it was a sorrowful countenance rather than an angry one that she gazed on now, and she shook her head mournfully after a while, murmuring, 'Very kind to me.'

She seated herself near her uncle, preserving the most absolute silence, till he opened his eyes, and fixed them upon her.

'Agnes, you here?' he said, in a tone of surprise and affection.

'Yes, uncle, I am waiting for Francis. I hope that does not make you angry?'

'Angry, my dear child?' replied Mr. Faulkner, rather hurt at the word. 'No; why should it? Come here, Agnes, and sit by me. Do you think I am apt to be angry—with you?'

'No,' said Agnes, timidly obeying him. 'Oh, no, but—I wish—'

‘What? Agnes, anything I can do for you?’

Agnes hesitated.

‘I may gratify some simple desire of yours, poor soul,’ thought Mr. Faulkner, ‘though I have little left to bestow.’ His old love of giving was strong within him. ‘Come, tell me your wish, Agnes. If I can grant it, I will.’

‘Oh! yes,’ cried Agnes, joyfully; ‘you can grant it, if you like.’

‘How?’

‘Send for Geraldine home again! then she would be happy.’

‘It would take a long while to fetch Geraldine here, my dear,’ replied Mr. Faulkner, with a sigh.

A strange sensation he experienced in thus hearing that dear offender simply spoken of, without prelude, without excuse; a strange mingling of pain and pleasure in listening to and pronouncing again the name he had rigorously banished from his own and others’ lips. There was a picture of Diane suspended against the wall of the room; his eye involuntarily sought it, fancying that it must be the clue to the direction which Agnes’s thoughts had taken. Agnes had never observed it, and without heeding it now, she went on:

‘It could not take long, uncle, for Catherine and I have just walked there, and we are come in too soon, you see.’

‘Poor bewildered thing!’ murmured Mr. Faulkner, placing his hand on her head.

‘She was very glad to see me. She made me promise to ask Francis to let me come again. She looked very pale and sad; Catherine said that was about you.’

‘About me?’ asked Mr. Faulkner, with agitation, yet without the slightest belief in the reality of anything which he heard. ‘Why about me?’

‘Because you are angry with her. But why, uncle, are you angry when she is sorry? God is not angry when we are sorry.’

Mr. Faulkner bent down his head; he could not

restrain himself, he burst into tears. Agnes tenderly caressed him: 'You are sorry now; then both are sorry, and there can't be any more anger. May I call Catherine, and tell her so?'

'Stop, Agnes; who was with you this morning?'

'Catherine.'

'Where did she take you?'

'Oh! we went up a narrow staircase, and into a little room; and there she lay.'

'What did she say to you?'

'That she had been wishing to see me so long—for years.'

'For years! I must know the truth, the meaning of all this,' exclaimed Mr. Faulkner, with uncontrollable agitation. 'Call Catherine.'

He threw open the door, but could not command his voice to call her himself.

'Catherine, Catherine, come here. Is it not true, all that I say?' cried Agnes.

Catherine came quickly at the summons. She looked from one to the other with astonishment and eager interest.

'Catherine,' said Mr. Faulkner, 'come in. Tell me what all this means? Is it possible that *she* is near?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Here—in London—for years?' asked Mr. Faulkner, in accents stern with excess of agony.

'Yes, sir, indeed it is so.'

'And I had not one friend wise enough, true enough to force this knowledge on me!' he said, raising his hands as he spoke. Then letting them fall, as in despair, he added: 'Well, I suppose I deserved this; deserved that I should be left to accumulate sin and chastisement on my own head—suffering on hers. I was a hard man; I spoke as a hard man. I have been taken at my word. I must not complain.'

'But, sir, when she wrote ——'

'To whom?'

‘To you, sir, just before I met you once; do you remember, walking near ——’

‘I remember well. By your manner I thought you were about to disobey me, and to speak of her. Pride rose up, and forbad me to permit that. I passed on. One opportunity for retractation was cast away then, I have long since acknowledged it; but writing, Catherine, no writing of hers ever reached me.’

Catherine, in a transport of joy, cast herself on her knees, caught her master’s hand, pressing it to her lips, and wetting it with her tears.

‘Thank God, thank God, sir, for that; oh! what a weight off her heart and mine, and off your conscience, sir. No matter where the letter is, lost or not, you did not read it, and steel yourself to it.’

‘Never, so help me God!’ said Mr. Faulkner, solemnly.

‘Then, sir, you will see her now? She never dared write again. She thought she might not have a friend in Lady Rivers. Miss Owen did not wish it; she promised never to let her want, though that was the last thing Miss Geraldine could be brought to think of. But now, sir, she knows that you are suffering and alone; she knows that seas will roll again between you; and with her whole heart she desires that before you go, you should speak words of pardon and of peace for her mother’s—for Mary’s sake. She might well implore it in compassion for her own sufferings.’

‘Tell me, Catherine, what her sufferings are. Don’t spare me. Are they such as I might have spared her?’

‘Oh! no, sir, far beyond the reach of mortal care. God chastened her, as He chasteneth every child whom He receiveth—and he does receive her now most surely—then who shall refuse?’

‘Catherine, as I hope for His forgiveness, I forgive her, and will entreat her to forgive me?’

Mr. Faulkner sank down on a seat, and buried his

face in his hands. Catherine raised her streaming eyes to Heaven.

‘Is this happiness?’ whispered Agnes, throwing her arms around her. ‘You said we should be happy, if he forgave, I thought.’

‘Yes, yes, my dear child,’ said Catherine, embracing her, ‘this is happiness—the truest happiness, and God’s good Spirit and your dear voice have won it.’

‘It is done, sir,’ said Catherine, looking up, and seeing Sir Francis standing at their side with looks of astonishment; ‘and it is all Miss Agnes’ doing, and if ever my poor child deserved that any human being should deal kindly by her, she deserved it of your sister.’

Sir Francis needed no further explanation; he wrung his uncle’s hand and Catherine’s with equal energy, and embraced Agnes so many times that she now began to believe that they all were happy indeed.

Catherine could not consent that her child should be agitated by the sight of either Mr. Faulkner or Sir Francis that day, and she gave them the details they were so desirous to obtain, of the events of Geraldine’s life from the time that they had lost sight of her. Mr. Faulkner heard with deep humiliation of the services rendered by Gwen (Catherine no longer withheld her name) to the poor sufferer towards whom he had neglected to exercise that merciful consideration which Fuller attributes to the good Father: ‘If his childe prove wilde he doth not cast him off so farre but he marks the place where he lights.’ Self-convicted of this grievous want of true parental affection, how could he any longer resent that Geraldine had denied him a parent’s name?

Sir Francis perceived a dark cloud of remembrances of the past sweeping over his uncle’s mind, and filling it with gloom; he strove as much as possible to cheer and to reassure.

‘It is a great blessing indeed, sir, that you should

have it in your power to see this poor thing before you depart, and when you have lightened her heavy load of sorrow by your pardon, you will be able to look back on the shores of England, and feel that you have not left one heart behind which has the right to breathe a murmur of complaint.'

'Stop, my dear fellow, stop,' interrupted Mr. Faulkner, with much discomposure; 'your kind desire always to lessen pain is now carrying you far beyond the truth, and thank God, I am not yet too great a coward to look truth in the face. Do you suppose that it will not cause me unceasing regret to have withheld my pardon till I had nothing else to bestow? to have let this poor child languish through years of privation, when every alleviation art can supply to suffering I might have furnished her with, and while the scanty provision which was made for her was at the expense of the daily toil of one, who might fairly have been employed in laying up some future store for herself? And this was Gwen! on whom I have scarcely bestowed a passing thought since she first quitted my roof!'

After this exclamation Mr. Faulkner fell into a train of musing, from which he evidently did not wish to be recalled. Sir Francis and Agnes took their departure. Catherine went out. Mr. Faulkner pursued his meditations in solitude, and from time to time took a hasty turn in the narrow chamber, stung by the dart of some keen recollection. More than once he uttered, 'And this was Gwen!'

Catherine returned, and approaching her master, said: 'Sir, I have prepared the Countess; she thanks you most gratefully for your kind intention. She will see you to-morrow.'





CHAPTER XXV.

— How oddly will it sound that I
Must ask my child forgiveness—
There, sir, stop ;
Let us not burden our remembrances
With a heaviness that's gone.

SHAKESPEARE.

G WEN heard from Geraldine how eventful the day had been, and with the kindest efforts and most entire self-forgetfulness strove to soothe and strengthen her cousin for the trial of the morrow. How could Geraldine feel otherwise than appalled at the prospect of meeting Mr. Faulkner? With not less pain and dread did he await the hour. Yet to each was the prospect the only precious one possessed by earth.

In the morning Gwen dressed Geraldine, and placed her on her couch. She arranged everything around so as to give a cheerful appearance to the room, and to make it look as little like that of an invalid as possible. Then, tenderly kissing her cousin, she stood ready to depart, but Geraldine held her hand fast for a moment.

‘Gwen, I know very well that you can keep things in your heart and thoughts all the while that you seem most busily engaged, and to-day I doubt not you will do so by me. You will know when the hour of trial is arrived ; you will pray for me then. I hardly see how I can do anything very wrong—anything to anger him afresh in such a meeting as this?’

‘Impossible !’ said Gwen. ‘It is his own heart that

will reproach him,' she thought, as she looked on Geraldine's faded form. There was one bright burning spot of colour on her sunken cheek. 'He can't help recognising her, and that is all. You will have Catherine near,' she added, embracing her again. 'I shall indeed leave my heart and thoughts with you, dearest, but I had better go now.'

Geraldine relinquished her hold. It was Gwen's decision, therefore she submitted; it would not have been her own. By preference she would have detained her even until Mr. Faulkner's step should be heard on the stairs; but Gwen was sure that Geraldine would be better alone during the half-hour which had yet to elapse. With herself this might have been; to Geraldine solitude was a perilous trial of strength; there never was a more dependent nature than the once rebellious, wilful Geraldine's, even at the height of her pride. As she lay in these terrible moments of suspense, she repeatedly raised her handkerchief to wipe the cold drops from her brow. She trembled and started at every sound in the street, each of which seemed to reach her with peculiar distinctness. Had she not summoned resolution to force herself to open Mary's Bible, which was beside her couch, and to read here and there a verse at a time, she could not have sustained the anxiety.

At length she heard the door open and shut; she heard steps mount the stairs; she recognised old age and feebleness in that of Mr. Faulkner. In another moment Catherine was at her side.

'He is here.'

Geraldine motioned her to kneel; and rising, threw her arms round her neck, and sobbed convulsively.

'For his sake,' whispered Catherine, after allowing a brief indulgence to this emotion, 'for his sake, try to be calm. He is old—he is as much touched at heart as you can be.'

'I shall be calmer, perhaps, when he is here,' replied Geraldine, in a touching tone of penitence. 'And now

let him come ; it is cruel to keep him in suspense—I know that.’

Catherine left her, and Mr. Faulkner entered the room alone. He had hoped that consideration for Geraldine, and his own reserved, undemonstrative nature, would enable him to look on whatever awaited him with outward firmness ; but at the first sight of Geraldine’s pale, eager, agonised face turned upon him, he stopped short, and concealed his own. Geraldine could not bear this ; she even fancied there was something of abhorrence in the gesture ; and casting herself from her couch, and sinking on the ground, she cried :

‘Pardon me ; it is all I ask—only that one word ! Then turn away, and never grieve yourself by the sight of me more.’

But Mr. Faulkner bent over her, raised her, held her to his heart in speechless grief and remorse, then carried her back to her couch. Never had he touched her with such tenderness before, and Geraldine let her head sink on his breast as on that of a father for the first time in her life. The dying face of Mary hovered before his eyes.

‘My child ! my child !’ at length he exclaimed, his words interrupted with sobs ; ‘would to God that I had taken you back to these arms, and pronounced a father’s blessing while I had a father’s home to take you to ! Now I am a weak, spirit-broken, ruined old man, whom your forgiveness cannot make able to forgive himself. The pride that crushed you is now trampled in the dust. I have no longer power to atone for the misery of years which in heartless, wilful ignorance and blindness, I have inflicted on you.’

‘Nay,’ cried Geraldine, ‘it was yours, and yours only, to grant me the sole thing on earth I desire before I die—the privilege of calling him once more father whom I so daringly, so ungratefully disowned. As to the miseries of past years, remorse has been the chief, and that was my own infliction. The chastisements of God have proved the great blessings of my

life, and friends have I had such as adversity alone discovers.'

'Geraldine,' replied Mr. Faulkner, emphatically, 'may what you say of your past years be verified in my remaining span of life. Then will God show me most undeserved mercy! It would be false to deny that each has not to forgive, but I feel that I have been immeasurably the greater offender.'

'Let us rest in the assurance of perfect reconciliation,' said Geraldine, with indescribable sweetness.

It was now her delight to listen to the cordial approbation which Mr. Faulkner bestowed on Gwen for having done all that he had left undone—approbation such as none but a generous nature would have conceded. Geraldine clasped her hands in joyful gratitude, and poured forth from her full heart the expression of the love and reverence which Gwen deservedly excited.

'I must see her later,' said Mr. Faulkner, 'though she can little desire to meet the stern man who was helping to crush the sufferer she strove to uphold. I must see her, and acknowledge my humiliation and her excellence. Tell her so, Geraldine.'

'Who will meet you with more cordial love than Gwen, now that you are in all things true again to your own generous nature?' replied Geraldine.

Catherine was at hand to represent a truth which each recognised—that this first meeting was too agitating to be prolonged. Mr. Faulkner retired, and Geraldine folded her hands on her bosom, saying:

'I could die now, if God pleased!'

A sweet smile diffused itself over her countenance, and ere long she sank into a sleep like that of a child—Catherine watching by her.

As Mr. Faulkner turned from the door of Gwen's humble abode, he said to himself:

'What bright examples of virtuous energy, of suffering resignation have been shining here, hidden from men, seen of angels, to be rewarded of God.'

From the day of reconciliation, it was Catherine's fond desire to remove Geraldine to Mr. Faulkner's home in Boulogne, and to devote herself to the care of both alike.

'I am strong, I am healthy; as long as it shall please God to continue me so, I can do all I propose. Whichever goes first, I can abide with the other: or if I am removed, God will send them a better prop. He will care for them, for they cast their care on Him. But Miss Gwen—not for the world would I wound her heart while I seek the post she generously filled when I was forced to yield it. Her feelings lie deep and still; when she says least she suffers most; and there never was truer love than she has grown to feel for my poor child.'

Gwen was too clear sighted not to discover Catherine's design while it was yet unspoken. She did not immediately reveal her discovery, but went through her ordinary avocations as she had often done before when her heart was riven with home grief.

'I see—a fresh decree of change has gone forth. They will take her from me, my cherished one of years.'

At night she lay down, to rise again, choked, suffocated by tears.

'Losing her, I shall go hence and seek Hugh. Seven years ago I lay down watering this pillow with my tears because I could not seek him.'

In the morning Gwen woke up with the firm resolution to assist Catherine in the accomplishment of her plan.

'She is free now, and this is her fitting office; and I am free to join the one who waits, who has long waited me—dear, patient, self-forgetting Hugh.'

While her whole heart ached with the pang of saying 'Farewell, Geraldine!' there was still a deep underthrill of joy in uttering 'Welcome, Hugh!'

Gwen had to reconcile her cousin also to the advisableness of parting.

'My dearest Geraldine, here is what you have often

despaired of ever again obtaining : something to do, as well as to suffer. Oh ! what an unspeakable increase of happiness to Mr. Faulkner to have his child and Catherine with him. What a blessed avocation for you ! Geraldine, sister, we must part, it is true ; but we have lived with and loved one another long enough now to leave separation little power to work us harm. Absence we can brave ; time we can spare ; we can trust our love to its tide, like bread cast on the waters, sure to find it again when we reach the same haven. Farewell, my Geraldine. I go to Hugh to labour with him, for him, till parting come there also.'

'She will be with Hugh,' repeated Geraldine to herself, as she listened while Gwen with beaming eyes spoke of her distant field of earnest toil, hopeful, happy, because Hugh would be there to direct, to train, to aid her. She began to ask, what had kept Gwen so long from his side, and at last the answer came :

'It must have been for me !'

She turned to embrace Gwen, whispering :

'Gwen, Gwen, do you remember the words which I wrote to Hugh ? Were they not just and true ? I see now all you have done for me, all you have relinquished—God bless you !'

But Gwen disengaged herself from this fond embrace, and went quite away, as she was wont to do, when in danger of hearing the language of thankfulness and praise.

Sir Francis Rivers carried Geraldine himself on board the steamer which was to bear her, his uncle, and Catherine to Boulogne.

'Geraldine,' he said, in a low voice, 'you have not treated me well ; I bade you remember me as a friend, and you never sought me when you needed one. I could have set everything right long ago — (here was Sir Francis's old prevailing idea). This must not be for the future.'

'It shall not,' answered Geraldine, gratefully.

'I shall come to Boulogne soon to see how you are,

and bring Agnes with me some day,' said Sir Francis, as he bid them adieu, and he strove to think it was the wind which made his eyes water so strangely.

Gwen had yet to write to her brother, and to wait his reply. During the intervening months she employed all her energy in the study of eastern tongues, on which she had long since entered.

'He shall find that I have not to learn everything from the beginning,' she said.

Having brought all her affairs in London to a conclusion, Gwen went to Boulogne. On the steamer she met Sir Francis Rivers hurrying there full of delight:

'Some old debts had been found out by that capital fellow Scott, and called in, and they would make his uncle's income not quite so miserable.'

During Gwen's stay at Boulogne, Lady St. Ruth came there; she saw Geraldine, and who could be more willing than Lord St. Ruth now showed himself to encourage the renewal of all their early friendship? Sweet was it to Gwen to witness their intercourse.

This visit to Boulogne was the last earthly meeting of the Cousins.

In the spring Gwen sailed for India.

THE END.

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